Safeguarding children from sexual abuse in residential schools

April 2020
Safeguarding children from sexual abuse in residential schools

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Commissioned and undertaken on behalf of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

April 2020
Disclaimer

This research report has been prepared at the request of the Inquiry's Chair and Panel. The views expressed are those of the authors alone. The research findings arising from the fieldwork do not constitute formal recommendations by the Inquiry's Chair and Panel and are separate from legal evidence obtained in investigations and hearings.
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We would like to thank Rachel George, Holly Rodger and Verena Brähler at the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, Julie Taylor at Birmingham University and Craig Keady and colleagues at the NSPCC for their support and guidance throughout the study.

At NatCen Social Research, we would like to thank Hannah Piggott, former colleagues Sandy Chidley and Bethany Thompson and associate, Rachael Owen for their involvement in the research.

Finally, we are very grateful to the children, staff, parents and local authority representatives who participated in this research as well as those who helped to organise the fieldwork. Without their contributions and assistance, this research would not have been possible.
Executive summary
Background

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ("the Inquiry") was set up in March 2015 and aims to consider the extent to which some state and non-state institutions in England and Wales have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, and to make meaningful recommendations for change.

The Inquiry’s investigations look at how different institutions have responded to child sexual abuse. The residential schools investigation’s remit is to investigate the institutional response to allegations of child sexual abuse in residential schools. There are two broad types of residential schools:

- mainstream residential schools, which include independent or private schools (typically fee-paying) and state boarding schools (where the educational element is funded by the state and the boarding element is paid for privately); and
- schools that provide for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).¹

Throughout the report the term 'mainstream' school is used to refer to the independent and state boarding schools and 'special' schools to refer to schools that are exclusively attended by children with SEND.

Residential schools vary in size and nature. At the time of writing there were:

- 502 mainstream residential schools in England, of which 40 were state boarding schools (GOV.UK, 2019);
- 269 residential special schools in England (GOV.UK, 2019); and
- 22 residential schools overall in Wales (StatsWales, 2019).

Most are not exclusively residential but have a mix of day and residential students. Many students 'flexi board', staying some time at school but also at home. Twelve mainstream boarding schools have boarding only and no day students (Stevens et al., 2019).

Research aims

The Inquiry commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and ResearchAbility to carry out mixed methods research to support its residential schools investigation. The overarching aims were to:

- explore how child sexual abuse in residential schools in England and Wales is understood from the perspective of school staff, children, parents and local authority staff;
- explore residential schools' safeguarding practice in relation to the prevention, identification, reporting of and response to child sexual abuse in residential schools from the perspective of staff, children and parents; and

¹ Most of these students will have an education, health and care (EHC) plan from their local authority in which the school is named. This means that it has been determined that their learning needs would be best met in a specialist setting, where their wider health and/or social care needs can also be met.
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● collate views from staff, children and parents on good practice in residential schools in the prevention, identification, reporting of and response to child sexual abuse.

Methodology

The research comprised of two main data collection strands:

● qualitative interviews and focus groups with residential school staff, children, parents and local authority representatives; and

● an online proforma which schools completed to capture information about concerns with a sexual element that had been recorded in safeguarding logs.

Across England and Wales, 15 case study schools were purposively sampled for range and diversity across key characteristics including school type, sex, age and region. Schools included in the Inquiry’s investigations were not eligible to take part.

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<td>Schools Carried out at 13 of the 15 schools completed by 15 schools</td>
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<td>Data collection Data were collected from: 100 members of staff 43 children 17 parents 7 local authorities.</td>
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<td>Data were collected from schools’ safeguarding logs about the number of concerns with a sexual element recorded in one academic year (up to 10 concerns per school).</td>
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<td>Aim To explore understanding of safeguarding issues and schools’ safeguarding practice in relation to different types of child sexual abuse and for different groups of children, and to collect views on improvements that could be made.</td>
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The study had some limitations. The research findings are unlikely to cover the full spectrum of all schools’ practice. Schools included in the Inquiry’s investigations (previous or ongoing) were not eligible to participate, which may bias data collection towards schools with a stronger safeguarding culture. The qualitative data also suggest that schools participating in this research were those that felt more confident in their safeguarding practice. The proforma data do not provide a comprehensive view of all incidents that happened in school but offer a starting point for better understanding and context, providing insight into schools’ record-keeping and response processes.

The research was approved by the Inquiry’s and NatCen’s Research Ethics Committees, and a detailed disclosure protocol was designed to ensure that any disclosure of harm was responded to appropriately.
### Nine key findings from the research

1. **Within the education sector, residential schools face distinct and complex challenges to prevent and respond to incidents of child sexual abuse effectively.**

   The overarching theme across all aspects of the research was the specific challenges that residential schools face in relation to safeguarding children, some of whom have very high levels of need due to their SEND. This includes the need to balance independence and privacy with keeping children safe in a place which acts as their home as well as their school.

   The distance some parents lived from school and the diverse range of cultures which children were from could act as barriers to successfully engaging parents in training and education on safeguarding children from sexual abuse. Some parents and schools had different views on children’s use of and access to devices, such as removing mobile phones and other devices from students at night. Another example was the difficulty for parents living far away or overseas of attending safeguarding workshops at the school.

   Staff in residential schools spent a significant amount of time with children in their care, and it was acknowledged that they might therefore play a greater role in identifying and responding to incidents of sexual abuse than staff in non-residential settings. The importance of tailored and comprehensive training was viewed as vital in this context. It was acknowledged, for example, that training should address the potential for lines of professional boundaries to become blurred due to the ‘in loco parentis’ role played by staff in residential settings.

2. **All participants could identify ‘clear cut’ types of child sexual abuse such as sexual violence and rape but were less confident about identifying and dealing with peer-on-peer concerns and other ‘grey areas’.**

   Staff participants acknowledged that identifying the point at which an incident becomes abusive could be difficult. Issues between children (students in romantic relationships, for example) and youth-produced sexual imagery (for example, sharing pictures of girls in bikinis) were described as ‘grey areas’. These were also noted as grey areas by children who largely thought of peer-on-peer abuse as relationships where there was a significant age gap.

   Navigating these ‘grey areas’ required a sensitive assessment of the nature of the relationship between the people involved and consideration of any cognitive impairment or communication needs and other contextual factors such as peer pressure.

3. **Prevention work was multi-faceted and included awareness-raising, and education and training of staff, students and parents. This was both supported and underpinned by a strong ‘safeguarding culture’ within schools.**

   Promoting open and trusting relationships was seen as key to creating a culture that helped prevent child sexual abuse and supported early identification of issues. This involved ensuring that approaches to preventing child sexual abuse (such as safer recruitment) were in place, and that situational risks (such as shared dormitories and bedrooms) were managed.

   In some mainstream schools, areas such as bedrooms and bathrooms were identified as potentially riskier and were checked more regularly to ensure children were safe. In some special schools, there was more active management of all spaces, which included, for example, restricting access to bedrooms and staff logging entry and exit times in communal spaces to provide a full audit of all events.

   Of key importance was building open and trusting relationships across and within the staff group; between children and staff; in children’s relationships with each other and in the schools’ relationship with parents. Interactions at school were expected to be respectful, and a zero-tolerance approach to the use of sexualised, sexist or discriminatory language was advocated.
4. Parents and children wanted education and awareness-raising work within the school to start as early as possible. However, some parents were more 'hands-off', trusting the school to take the lead.

Children and parents wanted schools to deliver appropriate messages as early as possible, adapting approaches for age and developmental phase. Some parents described themselves as more 'hands-off' in their engagement with education and awareness-raising because they trusted the school to educate children on this (and related) issues.

Education and awareness-raising work could be challenging in the SEND context due to the range of complex needs that some children had – for example, cognitive impairment making it difficult for the concept of child sexual abuse to be understood.

Parents thought that children should be supported to learn how to use the internet safely so that these skills could be applied both inside and outside of school.

Children thought that education was effective when it included repeated messaging, informal discussions and bringing in external speakers to talk to children. Children valued approaches which addressed and dealt with issues related to child sexual abuse directly.

5. Disclosures were often initiated by children, suggesting that some children felt able and comfortable to talk about their concerns. Overall, staff reported the highest number of concerns.

Children weighed up factors such as privacy and control when making decisions about disclosure. Having staff who children trusted to go to when they were ready to speak was important. Challenges to children disclosing concerns could relate to communication needs (especially in special schools) or emotional factors such as shame.

Staff in special schools where children had high levels of need were more actively involved in identifying signs of abuse than staff in mainstream settings. This could include physical monitoring, such as using body maps to record any bruises or unexplained injuries, or enabling non-verbal communication through a range of approaches.

6. Reporting practice varied between residential schools in the study, despite working from the same statutory guidance.

School staff emphasised the importance of logging all concerns of a sexual nature, including 'niggling doubts'. This enabled schools to build a rounded view of a child or young person from different staff and help identify concerns at an early stage if a worrying picture was emerging.

There were differences between concerns that schools discussed in interviews and recorded in the proforma. For example, two schools did not record any concerns in their safeguarding records over one academic year, despite all schools visited talking about dealing with issues in this area. This could be because some schools logged concerns elsewhere – in behaviour logs, for example.

7. Residential special schools recorded nearly ten times the number of concerns per student than other residential schools.

This could suggest that special schools are identifying and reporting a higher proportion of incidents taking place, or that more concerns of a sexual nature occur in these settings due to the level and type of needs that some children with SEND have (for example, concerns like children getting undressed in inappropriate places).
8. Staff reported that they understood the guidance and knew what to do when incidents were raised. The use of discretion by safeguarding leads following up on concerns was important.

Staff were clear that concerns needed to be logged and reported to the designated safeguarding lead, reflecting the emphasis placed on awareness of safeguarding procedures. It was clear that designated safeguarding leads used their professional judgement to ensure a proportionate response to incidents, especially those described as ‘grey areas’. In exceptional circumstances, this sometimes meant that incidents that constituted a crime were not reported to the police.

Following an incident, schools offered support to those affected, carried out education and awareness-raising with students, undertook risk assessments and worked with local authorities to share learning and expertise.

9. Schools reported difficulties escalating referrals to local authorities.

Schools reported variation across different local authorities in their thresholds for accepting referrals. This was particularly problematic in some special schools where it was felt that the specific needs of children and/or parents with SEND – including, for example, cognitive impairment and intellectual disabilities – were sometimes not fully understood by local authorities.

In contrast, local authority participants reported working hard to ensure that threshold information was well disseminated and understood, referring to the published guidelines and awareness-raising that schools said they wanted.

The timeliness of referrals and follow-up investigations by local authorities was also an issue of concern for some schools. This included the speed of local authority response to referrals, which was sometimes beyond the required one-day window; reduced weekend cover within local authorities; and the length of investigations, which sometimes had negative impacts on those involved.

More details on the key research findings detailed above are outlined in the following sections across four themes: understanding, prevention, identification, and response to child sexual abuse.

Understanding what child sexual abuse is

School and local authority staff generally had a clear theoretical understanding of what constitutes child sexual abuse, which included specific forms of abuse such as physical or ‘contact’ abuse, online abuse (including image sharing and grooming), being shown inappropriate images (both online or offline), peer-on-peer abuse, intra-familial abuse and harmful sexual behaviour. There were, however, ‘grey areas’ where issues were considered less ‘clear-cut’. These included image sharing and understanding what constitutes abusive behaviour in the context of relationships between peers.

In these ‘grey areas’, professionals felt it was important to consider the ages of those involved and their relationship to each other, cognitive impairment, clarity of consent, power differentials and contextual influences such as peer pressure.

While generally able to define child sexual abuse in relatively broad terms, children were less clear about peer-on-peer abuse and child sexual exploitation, as well as whether and how image sharing related to child sexual abuse. In special schools, there were a range of additional complexities, such as cognitive impairment and learning disabilities that could make it more difficult for some students to fully understand the definition of child sexual abuse and/or communicate their needs with family, friends and school staff.

Parents’ understanding tended to be focused more on physical acts and some were surprised by the breadth of the definition of child sexual abuse provided in interviews, especially the inclusion of online-facilitated abuse.
Prevention of child sexual abuse

The residential context requires schools to work in a wider and more complex range of situations than is needed in day schools. Responsibility for 'round-the-clock' care, leisure time on and off-site, as well as peer relationships outside the classroom are key distinctive features of safeguarding in these settings. This is further complicated in residential special schools where there are additional requirements to meet higher levels of health and care needs alongside children’s education and learning, increasing the amount of contact and time staff spend with children.

Structural approaches

Schools' governance structures had checking and balancing responsibility for safeguarding. While schools felt that these structures generally worked well, challenges could arise, for example where governors lacked experience in education and working with children.

Local authorities that commissioned residential education provision monitored schools through visits and contract management meetings on safeguarding practice. Some also discussed carrying out broader auditing processes of all schools in their area, which focused on reviewing school policies and processes. For example, one Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) asked all schools in the area to complete a safeguarding self-assessment.

Schools used a range of approaches to ensure they recruited staff who were capable of safeguarding children and posed no risk of harm. These included screening, checking employment history, obtaining satisfactory references, enhanced DBS clearance, and trial working periods.

Despite meeting minimum standards for recruitment and vetting, staff acknowledged that this was not a failsafe against appointing someone seeking to abuse children. The length of time involved in pre-employment checks and vetting also posed the risk of losing potentially good staff.

Education and training

Safeguarding training in schools was delivered to all school staff via the local authority as well as internally. Feedback on the quality and nature of training was mixed. For example, the core training offered by the local authority was often thought to be important for new recruits, but those who had attended several times felt it could be improved by further tailoring and using more engaging techniques (for example, discussion of case study scenarios). Training of external support staff, such as local authority transport employees, was less consistent.

Local authority participants discussed the importance of tailoring training to ensure it met schools’ needs, and described providing learning gathered from other schools, including from serious case reviews.

A key challenge in supporting children to build their understanding of issues around child sexual abuse was determining the right developmental phase for material to be introduced.

“We try and tailor it to fit the needs and the understanding of the young people within those environments.”

Staff, special school
Across both mainstream and special schools, work that dealt specifically with relationships, sex and sexual abuse built on a foundation of more basic information about school rules and appropriate behaviour, which was a focus during children’s earlier education and would be tailored to the specific needs of children in different settings.

“There’s [...] general guidance given, before we hone in to the specifics, just about the attitudes and values and expectations of just being a pupil here [...] In many ways, that forms the bedrock of the preventative measures, and then you come [on] to some of the specifics that you might have [...] like behaving inappropriately in a sexual nature [...] through the [...] PSHE programme.”

Staff, mainstream school

However, examples were given where education content had not been well targeted to developmental phases. Children and parents suggested that more detailed awareness-raising about online behaviours should be undertaken with younger children. Education in special schools was highly tailored, though some staff held the view that some children would struggle to have a basic understanding of risk even when different approaches to engaging them were utilised (for example, using alternative communication approaches such as story boards with those who have learning disabilities).

Effective education and awareness-raising included repeated messaging, informal discussions, bringing external speakers in to speak to children, and innovative story-telling approaches. Regardless of the mechanism, children valued approaches which tackled child sexual abuse issues directly and transparently. Children made two key suggestions for improvements. First, that it was important for children to be supported to understand the risks of child sexual abuse at the earliest age appropriate. Second, that the content of safeguarding education should be diversified, to cover a wider range of risks and models of abuse.

Situational approaches

Staff acknowledged the need to balance effective monitoring of the school environment with allowing children privacy and supporting the development of their independence within and beyond the school setting.

Schools described a range of approaches to help ensure appropriate and safe use of the internet, including: limited access to devices (removing them at night, for example) and sites deemed inappropriate for prolonged use; IT monitoring systems which filtered content and flagged attempts to access inappropriate content; and physical monitoring of access (i.e. staff watching children using devices in the same room). Despite such policies and approaches, it was felt to be challenging to effectively manage prevention activities in this rapidly-changing area, especially where children had access to the internet via 4G and where students’ computer literacy was greater than that of the school staff.

School staff also described forms of physical management of children by gender and age to keep them safe, ensure healthy boundaries between them and offer privacy when needed. This was felt to be a challenging and unique aspect of the residential context. School staff also discussed the need to manage physical space to prevent same-sex peer-on-peer abuse, such as sexual bullying among boys, for example.
Finally, schools identified ways in which they kept track of students' whereabouts. In mainstream schools, this involved staff being aware of children's locations during their free time, especially when there were known romantic relationships between students. In special schools where children had high levels of need, there was a much greater emphasis on continuous and active supervision of students, aiming to both reduce risk and identify signs of abuse quickly.

**Promoting trusting relationships**

Establishing and maintaining relationships between staff and children that were built on trust and transparency was described as fundamental. This meant that children were more receptive to messages communicated by staff and had the confidence to seek advice or support when needed. However, it was also acknowledged that there was a potential risk of professional boundary lines becoming blurred.

> “The boundary between a professional relationship in a residential setting, and [an] overfamiliar [one ...] is where a lot of the risks lie.”

Staff, mainstream school

The importance of involving parents within a culture of communication and openness was highlighted by schools and parents alike. To this end, schools aimed to provide clear, accessible information on safeguarding and wellbeing issues to ensure prevention work was as joined-up as possible.

> “I think [communication between schools and parents] it’s very important because you need to know what’s going on. At the end of the day, I’m ultimately responsible for him, he’s my son and I very much feel it’s my responsibility to keep him safe. So, it is very, very important. It’s important both ways [...] if I were to have any concerns, [it’s important] that they [the school] would be open and accept them, and I know that they are.”

Parent, special school

Although some parents appreciated the efforts schools made to engage them, others took a more ‘hands-off’ approach. However, parents who admitted to engaging less described having greater trust and confidence in the school to educate their children in such matters.

**Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse**

In the proforma, the number of concerns with a sexual element recorded in the last completed academic year ranged from zero to 21, with a mean of 5.8. No clear relationship between the numbers of recorded concerns and the school type was evident. Special schools recorded nearly ten times the number of concerns per student as mainstream schools, suggesting a difference in volumes of concerns (which could be related to the type of need that some of these children had) or different approaches to identification and reporting.

The proforma data showed that, across both mainstream and special schools, girls were more likely to have raised concerns than boys, though boys also logged online and peer-on-peer concerns as the most frequent issues.

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2 The proforma securely gathered information on the types of queries, concerns and incidents of a sexual nature or with a sexual element that are logged in residential schools’ safeguarding records.
Identification by staff

Changes in children's behaviour and physical presentation were considered potential indicators of child sexual abuse. The behavioural signs highlighted by staff included changes in engagement, deteriorating mental health, increased anti-social behaviour, and behaviours that challenge staff. Physical signs ranged from direct physical harm to changes in appearance, substance misuse and unexplained access to resources (such as money or new clothing).

Approaches to identifying changes in children's behaviour and presentation included individual welfare plans, information-sharing between staff and parents, and risk assessing individual children. The proforma indicated that care and boarding staff were most likely to identify concerns in special schools, perhaps reflecting the more proactive identification processes in place in these settings. Approaches to identifying child sexual abuse included 'body mapping' and completion of daily diaries which captured details of behaviour. Despite these approaches, identifying potential signs of child sexual abuse was described as challenging in relation to some children with complex needs.

Across the schools, staff discussed having a low threshold for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns. Staff across schools were encouraged to share information quickly with the designated safeguarding lead(s) about anything they noticed that seemed 'off' or about which they were uncertain.

The proforma data, however, provided insight into the range of concerns being logged in safeguarding records, and it seemed there were some disparities between schools about concerns that were and were not logged. For example, staff at all schools talked in the qualitative interviews and focus groups about dealing with safeguarding concerns relating to issues between children; however, these were only detailed in the proforma by some, and two schools did not report any concerns at all. Staff suggested that these differences could be explained by some concerns being recorded in behaviour rather than safeguarding logs; variations in levels of incident across different types of school; and changes in practice over time.

Disclosures initiated by children

The proforma highlighted high proportions of disclosures initiated by children, which were similar across mainstream and special schools. School staff, children and parents discussed a range of ways in which children might disclose and/or access support about sexual abuse, whether about them or other children in the school. They included raising concerns with a range of staff members; using tools to report remotely (online forms, paper forms and display boards, for example); speaking to wider support services (including statutory services like the police and social workers, voluntary services like Childline, and services commissioned by schools like advocates and 'independent listeners'); and receiving informal support from family, friends and peers.

Children expressed a range of ideas about how and to whom they might disclose. Some said they would weigh up a number of factors in determining how to proceed, taking into account issues of trust, privacy, accessibility or convenience. Adults and children described how children might progress from discussing concerns informally, to disclosure to school staff directly.

When thinking about disclosing to school staff, children were clear that they would speak to the person they trusted and liked most, irrespective of job role. As such, having open and trusting relationships across staff roles within schools was a key facilitator for identification and disclosure.
In special schools, children and staff often developed close relationships through more frequent contact to support and understand their needs. However, some participants raised concerns that settling and bonding can be longer-term processes for children with certain forms of SEND (for example, developmental delays or neuro-developmental conditions) in residential settings and that this could pose a risk for disclosure if children did not feel able to discuss issues with staff. Furthermore, this ‘close’ relationship might also pose a barrier to children disclosing if, for example, an adult abusing a child would always be present during opportunities when a child might speak to somebody else.

Signposting children to relevant support and giving them a choice of accessible routes to communicate their concerns both played a role in supporting children to disclose concerns or abuse. Some schools were able to offer access to the telephone whenever needed and had 24/7 support from house staff or medical services, meaning children could discuss their worries at any time.

Appropriate physical environments for private conversations of this nature were also an important consideration, as concerns about being seen or overheard could discourage children. However, school staff raised the importance of staff being able to balance the child’s desire for privacy with minimising the risk of false allegations and of the child feeling unsafe.

Children had concerns about the potential negative consequences of identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse: they feared implicating the perpetrator(s) and the impact this would have on how that person, or their wider peer group, viewed them. Other barriers to children raising a concern or disclosing sexual abuse included repressing or ignoring experiences due to feelings of anxiety, embarrassment or shame about the abuse.

**Response, support and aftercare**

*Raising and escalating concerns*

Staff were clear on the steps that should be taken if a concern was raised and talked about safeguarding being a ‘24/7 responsibility’ for everybody at the school. Similarly, if allegations were made about a member of staff, a standard process was followed, regardless of their role within the school. While there was less awareness of the process after referral to the designated safeguarding lead, there was confidence that they would take the necessary steps to manage and resolve incidents appropriately.

The immediate question for the designated safeguarding leads was whether a concern should be referred to an external agency or not. Some situations were seen to be clear-cut concerns for referral, such as if a member of staff had behaved in a sexually inappropriate way with a student. Differences in power dynamics were important considerations in the decision-making process too, including, for example, the age gap or difference in cognitive ability between students (especially for those with SEND). Staff talked about the challenge of establishing and making a judgement as to when incidents crossed a line from being acceptable to abusive, including in relation to concerns involving peers. If in doubt, designated safeguarding leads would consult with local authorities or the police. Both staff and local authority participants emphasised the importance of being able to have these discussions.
Differences in thresholds across English local authorities were widely reported by safeguarding staff in schools. Both mainstream and special schools reported that concerns referred to local authorities sometimes did not reach their thresholds. This was sometimes felt to be due to variability in response across local authorities (despite working from the same statutory guidance), which was a source of frustration for participants.

“We’ve had an ongoing battle about the threshold. We report [and] they say, ‘Oh, we don’t want to know about that.’ Then you have an inspector who says, ‘You need to report it.’ That discrepancy is just painful [...] They may also differ between local authority and they disagree with what the inspector says. [...] and obviously these are low-level things that we do feel are important for our young people to get sorted. So we do report it.”

Staff, special school

Staff from special schools also felt that the additional complexity of their students’ experiences was not always sufficiently understood by the local authority, meaning that some felt that children were left at risk when action had not been taken. In contrast, local authority participants spoke of working hard to ensure that threshold information was well disseminated and understood, referring to the published guidelines that schools said they wanted.

The proforma data indicated that most safeguarding concerns were not referred to external agencies but instead were dealt with by schools themselves, implying that schools perceived many concerns to be lower-level. Immediate measures by schools to ensure children’s safety could involve keeping students apart (though this could be challenging in practice); removing the alleged perpetrator(s) from the school; and confiscating or wiping devices.

**Follow-up and outcomes**

Support could be within the school in the form of pastoral support, school counsellors, specialist therapists and school nurses or external, including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), sexual health clinics or specialist support organisations. Schools acknowledged that some children may not feel able or ready to access support directly after a disclosure is made, highlighting the importance of offering children a range of options and ensuring support is accessible and non-threatening.

A range of punitive measures and remedial actions that aimed to bolster safeguarding practice were reported. Following the conclusion of an investigation, schools reported that if a staff member was found to have breached their contract due to sexually inappropriate behaviour, they would be dismissed. In mainstream schools, students could be asked to leave if their behaviour warranted it. Being excluded was not discussed in special schools. This probably reflects the fact that a core part of their work with students is to teach safe and appropriate behaviours.

Key remedial actions included awareness-raising activities with students, which typically took the form of revisiting topics that had already been addressed (such as e-safety or healthy relationships and consent) and reiterating messages about what is and is not appropriate. Staff also discussed reviewing processes and practice following incidents. However, finding the time to reflect on practice was thought to be challenging within the school environment.
CHAPTER 1: Introduction
This chapter provides background information about the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, as well as setting out the rationale for the research, its aims, methods and limitations.

1.1 Research background and context

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('the Inquiry') was set up as a statutory inquiry in March 2015. The Inquiry aims to consider the extent to which some state and non-state institutions in England and Wales have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, and to make meaningful recommendations for change, to help ensure that children now and in the future are better protected from sexual abuse.

The Inquiry has a dedicated research function, set up to generate new insight into both recent and non-recent child sexual abuse that will help inform the Inquiry’s recommendations, as well as contributing to and advancing the evidence base more broadly.

To date, the Inquiry has launched 15 investigations, each tasked with looking at how different institutions have responded to child sexual abuse. The residential schools investigation’s remit is to investigate the nature and extent of child sexual abuse in residential schools, and institutional responses.

There are two broad types of residential schools:

- mainstream residential schools, which include independent or private schools (typically fee-paying) and state boarding schools (where the educational element is funded by the state and the boarding element is paid for privately); and
- schools that provide for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Throughout the report the term ‘mainstream’ school is used to refer to independent and state boarding schools and ‘special’ schools to refer to schools that are exclusively attended by children with SEND.

In 2017, a feasibility study was commissioned by the Inquiry to explore the methodological and practical issues involved in researching child sexual abuse in residential schools and to make recommendations for this mainstage research. It concluded that there would be significant barriers to achieving a robust quantitative measure of the prevalence of child sexual abuse in residential schools. It also highlighted themes which were explored further in this study, including residential schools’ responses to online-facilitated child sexual abuse, and how schools and local authorities work together to address concerns over incidents of child sexual abuse.

In 2018, the Inquiry's research team carried out a literature review summarising the existing research on child sexual abuse in residential schools (Ward and Rodger, 2018). This is an under-researched area. The review explored what evidence there is on the scale and nature of child sexual abuse in schools, factors that influence the incidence and response to child sexual abuse, and efficacy of safeguarding measures in mitigating the occurrence of child sexual abuse in schools. The review also highlighted themes that were explored further in this research, for example, the importance of a school’s culture, safeguarding procedures, and awareness among staff and pupils about child sexual abuse, in contributing to the successful prevention, identification and reporting of child sexual abuse.
1.2 Aims and objectives of the research

The Inquiry commissioned this mixed methods research to support its residential schools investigation to understand how residential schools’ safeguarding policies and processes against child sexual abuse operate in practice. The overarching aims of the research were to:

- explore how child sexual abuse in residential schools in England and Wales is understood by staff, children, parents and local authorities;
- explore residential schools' safeguarding practice in relation to the prevention, identification, reporting of and response to child sexual abuse in residential schools from the perspective of staff, children and parents; and
- collate views from staff, children and parents on good practice in residential schools in the prevention, identification, reporting of and response to child sexual abuse.

1.3 Defining child sexual abuse

The language used to define and describe child sexual abuse and what is included in the definition have evolved over time. The current definition widely used by professionals working with children and young people is from *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department for Education, 2018b). It states that child sexual abuse involves:

> Forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

(Department for Education, 2018b)

Child sexual exploitation is referred to in the Department for Education’s statutory guidance as one type of child sexual abuse. This happens when an imbalance of power is exploited by an adult to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual activity either in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator (Department for Education, 2017).

The definition of child sexual abuse that was used to prepare for this study and collect data across participant groups was taken from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) guidance (NSPCC, 2019). The NSPCC definition contains the same information as the definition of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* but the language used is more accessible. The reason for using the NSPCC definition was to ensure participants understood the concept of child sexual abuse through inclusive and non-threatening language. Some participants understood child sexual abuse to include ‘child sexual exploitation’ (as outlined in Chapter 3), though this was not referred to in detail in the qualitative fieldwork carried out with participants.
‘Harmful sexual behaviour’ is described by as:

*Developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children and young people. It can be displayed towards younger children, peers, older children or adults, and is harmful to the children and young people who display it, as well as the people it is directed towards.*

(NSPCC, 2020; Hackett, 2014)

The term ‘harmful sexual behaviour’ is the Inquiry’s preferred descriptor because it encompasses more behaviours than just those between children of the same age. However, this study used the term ‘peer-on-peer’ to refer to concerns of a sexual nature between children in order to use language accessible to all participant groups; ‘peer-on-peer’ is therefore the term used throughout this report.

### 1.4 Methods and sample

#### 1.4.1 Methods

Fifteen residential schools and seven local authorities took part in this research. The research design comprised two main stages: an online proforma which gathered information on safeguarding incidents recorded by schools; and qualitative interviews with school staff, children, parents and local authority representatives. The qualitative data collected for this study are rich and detailed in their nature and are the main source of information used throughout the report. The report makes clear where data gathered from the proforma are discussed.

The study concluded with a workshop where 14 representatives from 10 of the participating schools shared their reflections on the emerging research findings.

Residential schools were invited to participate in both the proforma completion and qualitative interviews. Sampling and recruitment are discussed further in Appendix A.

The research teams gave careful consideration to the ethical implications of all aspects of the research. This included how to engage residential schools; ensuring participation did not risk harm to any participants, particularly those with personal experience of child sexual abuse; and gaining meaningful, ongoing consent from parents, carers and students to take part in the research.

The research was reviewed and approved by the Inquiry’s Research Ethics Committee and NatCen’s Research Ethics Committee. The detailed disclosure protocol was designed in close collaboration with the Inquiry’s safeguarding team and representatives of NatCen’s Disclosure Board to ensure that any disclosure of past or potential harm to participants was responded to appropriately.

*Qualitative fieldwork*

Qualitative fieldwork was carried out with 13 of the 15 schools that took part in the online proforma, as well as with representatives from seven local authorities. A senior lead at each school supported recruitment of school staff, children and parents to take part in interviews and focus groups.\(^3\) These aimed to explore understanding of safeguarding issues and schools’ safeguarding practice

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3 It was not possible to interview children at two schools. This is discussed in Appendix A.
in relation to different types of child sexual abuse and for different groups of children. Across the
data collection encounters it was important to include a range of views and perspectives. Staff
were sampled for diversity in role, including house staff, teaching staff and others alongside level of
experience, and children were sampled for diversity across key demographic characteristics such as
age, gender and disability. Quotas were monitored throughout the fieldwork period.

Interviews and focus groups with staff and children were carried out face-to-face in the schools.
Interviews with parents were carried out by telephone. This was both for participants’ convenience and
because parents were geographically widely dispersed (and not necessarily near their child’s school).

All interviews were based on tailored topic guides. Three topic guides were developed for children –
one for children in years 9 and above (aged 13–18); one for younger children (aged 9–13); and one
for children whose particular SEND affected their ability to understand the concept of child sexual
abuse (due to a learning disability, for example). The guides allowed researchers to frame questions
responsively, reflecting the language children used and understood. For the topic guide developed for
younger children and those with SEND, this included the option of exploring children’s understanding
of child sexual abuse in terms of concepts such as ‘keeping safe’ and ‘privacy’ as well as or instead of
specific discussion of ‘sexual abuse’, depending on what was deemed appropriate by the staff working
closely with those children in their residential setting.

The qualitative interviews and focus groups were carried out between May and July 2019 and lasted
between 20 and 100 minutes. Further discussion on the sampling, recruitment, conduct and analysis of
the qualitative interviews is given in Appendix A.

Online proforma

The online proforma collected data on schools’ safeguarding policies and anonymised information
from their safeguarding logs about any recorded concerns with a sexual element. Its purpose was to
explore the types of concerns that schools recorded, how these were responded to, and how they
related to school policies and the qualitative data that were subsequently collected about each school’s
safeguarding practice.

For each school, a single proforma was completed by the nominated lead. They were each asked
to provide details of up to ten relevant concerns over the last completed academic year: up to five
that had warranted onward/external referral, selected in date order; then up to five concerns with a
sexual element recorded (selected in date order without reference to the level of severity or response
process). The total number of concerns schools provided data about varied according to how many
relevant records they had in their safeguarding log.

The proforma was piloted with three schools in January 2019 and the mainstage data collection was
completed by 15 schools by April 2019. Descriptive analysis was used to explore key differences
between key variables. However, due to the sample size, no inferential analysis has been carried out.
Further detail on the design, administration, and analysis of the data collected via the proforma is given
in Appendix A.

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4 The selection of qualitative participants was not linked to the data recorded in the proforma, but to ensure a range of
   experiences and perspectives.
5 Children were sampled by school year group rather than age.
6 This included queries, concerns and incidents recorded as a single entry on their safeguarding log – all referred to as
   ‘concerns’ for the proforma. This was clarified in the proforma guidance and briefing to respondents.
1.4.2 Sample

The sample frame for this study was drawn from the government database Get information about schools (GIAS), which includes detailed information about all schools in England (GOV.UK, 2019). The equivalent Welsh government database StatsWales was used to sample schools in Wales (StatsWales, 2019). Across England and Wales, 15 case study residential schools were sampled purposively to ensure a range of establishments working with a cross-section of children and young people were included. A diverse sample across England and Wales was achieved, including different types of residential schools, special, independent and state, faith and non-faith, single and mixed sex schools and schools catering for different ages. We also monitored for diversity in relation to rural and urban locations, school size and the number of boarders.

Details of the sample of schools that took part in the research are set out in Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

Seven mainstream and eight special residential schools participated in the online proforma, and of these, five mainstream and all eight special schools participated in the qualitative research. Four of the five mainstream schools that participated in the qualitative research were independent, fee-paying schools and one was a selective state boarding school.

Table 1.1: Achieved mainstream residential schools sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Sampling characteristic</th>
<th>Total: proforma</th>
<th>Total: interviews and focus groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School type</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-religious</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>Secondary with sixth form</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All through</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>London and South East England</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East England and Midlands</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North England and the Humber</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South West England</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of mainstream schools sampled</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2: Achieved residential special schools sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Total (proforma and qualitative)</th>
<th>Total (interviews and focus groups)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London and South East England</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East England and Midlands</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North England and the Humber</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West England</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of special schools sampled</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As set out in section 2.1.2, many children and young people have more than one type of SEND and residential special schools will often cater for more than one type of SEND, but for the purposes of sampling, the primary need listed in the data source (GOV.UK, 2019) was used.

Details of the breakdown of participants involved in the qualitative fieldwork across school participant populations are provided in Table 1.3.7

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7 The sample details provided in Table 1.3 relate to participants involved in the qualitative fieldwork only. The information provided by schools in the proforma relate to details documented in safeguarding records in sampled schools across one year. Individuals reported on in the proforma do not in any way relate to the qualitative sample achieved for the study.
Table 1.3: Achieved qualitative samples: children, school staff, parents and carers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sampling criteria</th>
<th>Achieved sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: female</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: male</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School year: years 5–6 (primary, KS2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School year: years 7–9 (secondary, KS3)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School year: year 10+ (secondary, KS4)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability: with a disability</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability: without a disability</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: Senior leadership team (e.g. head teacher)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: pastoral/safeguarding lead</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: teaching staff</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: care and accommodation staff</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential school experience: 5+ years</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential school experience: 5 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential school experience: not recorded</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents and carers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding status of child: full-time/termly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding status of child: weekly/flexible</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from school: international</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from school: England/Wales</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Where staff held multiple roles, they were counted in each of the relevant groups. As such, the totals across each type of role do not match the total number of staff participants in the research.

† One parent’s children did not board at the residential school.

Local authorities were sampled separately to the schools to preserve participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. The local authority sample was selected primarily by geographic location, the number of residential schools in the area and inspection ratings of local authority children’s services (ILACS) to achieve diversity across these criteria. To do this, information was taken from Children’s social care data in England 2018 (GOV.UK, 2018). Those who expressed an interest in taking part were screened for eligibility (as those with previous or ongoing involvement with Inquiry investigations were not eligible to participate). Seven local authorities took part in the research by telephone.
A range of participants with different roles took part in the research, depending on how services were organised within the local authority. Most led on safeguarding work within educational settings and roles included safeguarding leads, child protection officers, quality assurance leads and local authority designated officers (LADOs). Contact was made initially with the Director of Children's Services within each authority who facilitated access to the most relevant individuals to invite to participate.

1.5 Benefits and challenges of the study

There has been a wealth of research on child sexual abuse. However, research into child sexual abuse in residential schools is an under-researched area, as highlighted in the literature review undertaken by the Inquiry (Ward and Rodger, 2018) (see section 2.3). Given the current limited evidence base on safeguarding practice in residential schools, this project should be seen as an exploratory piece of work. The aims were broad and wide-ranging and as such, it was not possible to gather in-depth and detailed data on all of the issues raised, many of which were complex and multi-faceted. Furthermore, the study can only go so far to unpack differences between residential and non-residential schools as it was not possible for participants to fully reflect on this throughout the data collection. Further research will be required to fully explore all of the themes and issues raised in this project.

The study was robust in the design of the sampling, data collection and analysis. This report provides an accurate account of the data collected. However, it is important to note the limitations of the school sample, as these mean that the research findings are unlikely to cover the full spectrum of all schools' practice. First, schools and local authorities included in the Inquiry’s investigations (previous or ongoing) were not eligible to participate, which meant that a number of schools and local authorities with identified safeguarding issues could not take part. Second, participation of eligible schools was on a voluntary, opt-in basis. It also relied on their ability to accommodate proforma completion, recruitment and set-up of interviews with staff and children, contact with parents, and a day of qualitative fieldwork within their workloads.

While the qualitative data generally suggest that schools participating in this research felt confident in their safeguarding practice, participants reflected on the full range of challenges experienced. There was variation in practice, with good practice highlighted as well as when things had gone less well.

The data collected via the proforma provide an insight into schools’ record-keeping and response processes in relation to safeguarding but should not be considered fully representative of their experiences. The proforma did not collect data on all relevant incidents in some schools. For example, two schools reported that they had more than ten incidents in their log within the stated timeframe. Also, the proforma asked for details of up to five incidents that warranted onward referral and so the number and type of concerns that were considered will not necessarily be an accurate reflection of all types of logged incidents. Finally, it is likely that some issues of interest to this study might have been recorded elsewhere – in behaviour logs, for example – highlighting differences between schools in recording and reporting practice, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. As such, these data should be treated with some caution.
The qualitative research findings in this report give a broad sense of the range and diversity of participants’ views and experiences (as qualitative data, their prevalence cannot be estimated). However, limitations should be acknowledged:

- All participants opted into the research voluntarily: individuals with particularly strong views or who felt more confident in their knowledge of their school’s safeguarding approaches, for example, may have been more willing to participate.

- The research design aimed to include five or more children in years 5–6 of primary school (aged 9–11), but this target was not achieved. One factor influencing the age range that could be included was the need to ensure children in special schools were able to give informed consent and to talk to researchers in an interview context.

- It is unlikely that the children who participated in the research represent the full range of views and experiences of children on this topic. This is in part because schools were responsible for ascertaining which of their students it was appropriate to invite to take part. Parent/guardian and/or local authority permission (for looked after children) was also required to approach children about participating in the research. Children who schools considered unlikely to be comfortable or able to talk to researchers about the concept of child sexual abuse or for whom consent was not given by the relevant parent, carer and/or local authority, were therefore not included in the research sample.

- There were also challenges in recruiting parents, and the achieved sample was smaller and less diverse than intended: 14 of the planned 22 interviews were completed. Diversity across the sampling criteria (children’s boarding status and whether their home setting was in the UK or abroad) was limited.

- Individuals at local authorities who had at any time worked for an authority involved in the Inquiry’s legal investigations were excluded from the research, which meant that a high proportion of the original sample could not take part and the intended 15 interviews were not achieved. This limits the range of local authority staff data.

- The depth of local authority data was also limited. This was due to the nature of participants’ roles (for example, LADO and school safeguarding education/support roles), as some were unable to comment on particular areas of local authority involvement in safeguarding work (for example, data on local authority decision making and how thresholds for referral worked in practice).

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8 These are children in the care of the local authority. This could be for a number of reasons, including those at risk but also including those placed by the local authority in a residential school. For more detail, please see https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/children-and-families-at-risk/looked-after-children/
CHAPTER 2: Safeguarding in residential schools – context and background
This chapter gives contextual information for the study’s research findings. It looks at three relevant areas. Firstly, information about the residential school estate in England and Wales is provided, setting the research findings of this study in the wider context of residential schools and their student populations.

Secondly, an overview of the statutory requirements and governance in relation to safeguarding in schools is set out. This examines how schools are required to manage and respond to safeguarding risks, including how they should connect with the wider landscape of health and social care provision as well as the criminal justice system.

Thirdly, the existing literature on the issue of child sexual abuse in residential schools is discussed and the key issues noted.

2.1 Context: the residential school estate in England and Wales

Residential schools are institutions where students not only attend lessons but can also board. This means that as well as being a place of learning, they are also students’ homes: where they live, socialise, relax and sleep. It is this latter part of residential school life that sets them apart from other types of schools in relation to safeguarding. Residential school staff are not only responsible for keeping students safe during the school day, but also during their leisure time before and after school as well as overnight. As this report explores, this requires staff to balance the need to keep students safe whilst also providing privacy and independence.

As set out in section 1.1, this report focuses on mainstream residential schools (made up of independent and state boarding schools) and residential special schools that cater exclusively for students with SEND. These two settings are very different in nature. Figure 2.1 sets out some of the key features of each setting.

Broadly, mainstream residential schools are fee paying and often selective: what many people refer to as ‘private’ or ‘independent’ boarding schools. There are a small number of state boarding schools (40 in England; none in Wales) (UK Boarding Schools, 2018). At state boarding schools, the education but not the boarding is state funded. In both independent and state boarding schools, pupils generally study for public examinations in traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs, International Baccalaureate and A-levels.

Special residential schools cater for children and young people with SEND. Most of these places are funded by the local authority (and, in some cases, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)) because the child has an education, health and care (EHC) plan in which the school is named. This means that it has been determined that their learning needs would be best met in a specialist setting, where their wider health and/or social care needs can also be met. These schools often offer a wide range of qualifications.
Staffing structures at both the mainstream and special residential schools that took part in this research reflected the 'school' and 'home' dimensions of the residential setting, by having 'teaching' and 'care' staff. The role of teachers is self-evident. Care staff were responsible for the students outside of lessons: mornings, after school and overnight and were typically based in the residential part of the school. Teachers might perform both roles, for example, living on site and acting as a 'housemistress', 'housemaster' or 'house parent' alongside care staff. Children and young people with SEND might also have a keyworker with them to support them both in school and in the residential home.

### 2.1.1 Types of schools

Across all types of state and independent schools (residential and day schools) there are a range of funding and governance arrangements, as set out below.9

**Maintained schools** is a broad categorisation including schools which are funded via a local authority, but within this there is diversity of governance and finance. These include community schools, foundation schools, voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools.

**Academy schools** (which often operate in groups, known as multi-academy trusts or MATs) are funded directly by the Secretary of State for Education. They are managed and organised by the trustees of the Academies Trust and in practical terms, have financial autonomy and can opt out of the National Curriculum. Free schools, studio schools and free special schools are all types of academy schools, as are most state boarding schools.

**Independent schools**, as the name suggests, are schools run by charitable organisations, companies, or individuals who can charge fees for the education they provide. This category includes a small number of independent special schools run on a not-for-profit basis by a charitable organisation, which are defined in statute as non-maintained special schools.

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9 More information on specific residential school types can be found on the GOV.UK website: [https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school](https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school)
As illustrated in Figure 2.2, the vast majority of mainstream residential schools (93 percent) fall into the 'independent school' category.

Types of residential special schools are more mixed – see Figure 2.3. Over half are independent (52 percent), 16 percent are non-maintained special schools, 18 percent are maintained schools and 14 percent are academies.

To put the size of the residential school sector in context, in the January 2019 school census, 8.8 million children attended schools of all types in England (Department for Education, 2019b). The total number of students in residential schools in England (mainstream and special schools) is 260,862 or 3 percent of the total school population (GOV.UK, 2019). Of this, the majority (2.8 percent) attend mainstream schools and 0.2 percent are at residential special schools. This 3 percent includes students who attend residential schools as day students.

In Wales, the school population in the January 2019 census totalled 477,285 students (StatsWales, 2019). There are 22 residential schools in Wales. This includes both mainstream and special schools. At these schools, there are 1,837 boarders, making up just 0.003 percent of the total school population.10

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10 Data for a further breakdown of the Welsh residential schools by type of school and student characteristic were not available at the time of writing.
2.1.2 Mainstream residential schools

Key data relating to the size and distribution of students in the mainstream part of the residential school sector in England are set out below.¹¹

- The total number of students attending mainstream residential schools is 244,553, that is 2.8 percent of the total student population in England.
- There are 502 mainstream residential schools in England, including the 40 state boarding schools.
- 401 of these schools are mixed sex schools; 53 are boys’ schools and 48 are girls’ schools.
- There are slightly more boys (54.8 percent) attending mainstream residential schools than girls (45.2 percent).
- 34.5 percent of mainstream residential schools cater for students up to the age of 11 (school year 6); 65.5 percent are for students aged 11 and above (school year 7).
- Nearly half of residential mainstream schools are in London and the South-East (48.6 percent).
- The size of mainstream residential schools in England varies, as shown in Table 2.1. The mean number of students is 487. By way of comparison, the average state funded secondary day school has 965 students.

¹¹ These data were downloaded (on 10 August 2019) and analysed from the GIAS government database (GOV.UK, 2019).
Table 2.1: Size of mainstream residential schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of school</th>
<th>Number of schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 20 students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–100 students</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101–500 students</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501–1,000</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1,000 students</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*No data were available for three schools at the time of writing.

Independent Schools Council census data

The most reliable source of data about independent schools comes from the Independent Schools Council (ISC).\(^{12}\) The ISC conducts an annual census, which is completed by about half of all UK independent schools (including Wales and Scotland), representing around 80 percent of all independent school children (Stevens et al., 2019). Of the 1,364 schools that took part in the January 2019 census, 891 were day schools and 473 were schools that had at least one boarding pupil (Stevens et al., 2019).

ISC data from the January 2019 census shows a slight upward trend in the total number of students being educated in the independent sector – day and boarding schools – over recent years. The total currently stands at 536,109, which is the highest total since records began in 1974 and up from 529,164 in 2018 (Stevens et al., 2019).

The number of boarders has remained broadly stable over recent years, with a current total of 69,155, down slightly from 69,979 in 2018. This represents 12.9 percent of the independent sector’s student population. Although 35 percent of ISC schools have boarding facilities, at the majority (74 percent) of these, fewer than half the students board and only 12 schools are exclusively boarding schools (i.e. do not have day students). There has also been an increase in flexible boarding, where students board some of the time. The proportion of boarders in independent schools increases as students move up through the school. Only 2 percent of pupils under the age of 13 board compared to over a third of sixth formers (Stevens et al., 2019).

Non-British students at ISC schools whose parents live overseas form a significant minority of the student population at independent schools (day and residential) at a total of 28,910 pupils (5.4 percent). Of these non-British students, 13.1% are at independent schools that offer boarding provision compared to just 0.3% at independent schools for day pupils only (Stevens et al., 2019).

In the absence of parents living in the UK, both overseas and British students will have a named ‘guardian’, resident in the UK. This role is intended to provide support and care when students are not in school as well as being able to act ‘in loco parentis’ in case of emergency.

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\(^{12}\) The ISC is a not-for-profit organisation that represents over 1,300 independent schools in the UK.
2.1.3 Residential special schools

This section looks at the national context for students with SEND, before reporting the data for residential special schools.

It is important to note that the area of SEND is complex. Every child or young person with a special need or disability will be as different from each other as any other child or young person. However, for the purpose of diagnosis and data collection, these children and young people are assigned to one or more ‘types’ of SEND.

Many children and young people have more than one type of SEND and this can be seen in the range of needs that residential special schools can cater for. The data published by the Department for Education list only the primary type of special educational need, so this is how the SEND population of students is described in this section. However, this is not intended to detract from the individuality of these children and young people, the complex needs some children have and their unique sets of experiences.

The use of language about disability is important. Views about terminology such as ‘impairment’ or ‘disability’ can be based on whether terms have negative connotations, take a deficit or asset approach or use a bio-medical model. The language used in this report reflects the language currently used by the government and published in their statutory legislation and official statistics.

The total number of students with SEND in England has increased for the third consecutive year to 1,318,300 in January 2019 and represents 14.9 percent of the total pupil population (Department for Education, 2019c). This category of children is made up of two groups: those who receive SEN support and those with an EHC plan.

Most children or young people with SEND receive SEN support. This is when a school puts support in place using existing resources. Those who need more complex or significant support may also require an EHC plan (3.1 percent of the total pupil population in January 2019 (Department for Education, 2019c)). This is a legal document that sets out a child or young person’s needs relating to their education, health and social care and details what support is required to meet those needs. It is provided when a student’s needs cannot be met by the resources and facilities available, and where it is deemed that a specialist environment might be a more appropriate setting to meet their needs and support their educational development.

In Wales the total number of pupils with some form of SEND is 103,976, which represents 21.8 percent of the total pupil population (StatsWales, 2019). The Welsh system operates differently. For children with SEND in Wales, there are three tiers: School Action is where additional support is provided by schools (through individual education plans); School Action Plus is where external agencies provide support alongside schools to support students with SEND and there are Statements of SEN. The Statement of SEN operates like an EHC plan; it means that the child has a legal entitlement to a bespoke package of support to meet their needs. This was the system used in England before 2014. In 2018–19, 13 percent of Welsh students with SEN had statements. Due to the different systems for SEN provision that operate in England and Wales, it is therefore not helpful to directly compare these two figures.

13 In Wales, the term ‘special educational need’ or SEN is used rather than SEND. For the sake of consistency in this report, the term special educational needs and disabilities is used other than for these Welsh descriptors.
At a national level, speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is the most common primary type of SEND at 22 percent. For children and young people with an EHC plan, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the most common primary type of need, with 29 percent of this group of students having ASD as the primary type of need. Overall, 4.4 percent of boys have an EHC plan compared to 1.7 percent of girls. The percentage of pupils receiving SEN support peaks at age 9–10 before decreasing. However, the trend with EHC plans is in the opposite direction, with the proportion of students with an EHC plan increasing as pupils grow older (Department for Education, 2019c).

Key data relating to the size and distribution of students in residential special schools in England are set out below (GOV.UK, 2019):

- There were 269 residential special schools at the time of this research.
- In total, 16,309 pupils were attending special schools that have residential provision (this includes both day and residential students).
- Of these 16,309 students, 78 percent were boys and 22 percent were girls.
- The latest publicly available data on the number of pupils boarding at residential special schools put this at 4,878 (Lenehan and Geraghty, 2017).
- Residential special schools tend to be smaller than mainstream residential schools as Table 2.2 shows, with an average of 61 students per school.

Table 2.2: Size of residential special schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of school</th>
<th>Number of schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 20 students</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–100 students</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101–500 students</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501–1,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1,000 students</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No data were available for six schools.
Pertinent to this research is the type of SEND that residential special schools provide for. For this analysis the types of primary need in SEND have been categorised into the following six groups\(^{14}\) using data collated by the government on schools\(^{15}\):

1. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
2. Learning difficulties (specific; moderate; profound and multiple; severe)
3. Speech, language and communication need
4. Sensory impairment (hearing, visual, multiple)
5. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)
6. Physical disability.

The number of residential special schools for each of these six SEND groups is set out in Figure 2.4, though it should be noted that schools generally cater for more than one need.

### 2.2 Overview of safeguarding children in residential schools

A central responsibility of all schools is to safeguard their students from harm. As highlighted in section 2.1 above, the key difference between residential schools and day schools is the fact that for students who board, school is not just a place of learning but their home as well. This section provides

![Figure 2.4: Residential special schools by primary type of SEND](source: Department for Education (2019d))

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\(^{14}\) This follows the categorisation used by the Department for Education (collapsing sub-groups for clarity of data presentation) and was also the basis used for sampling. The 13 schools who listed ‘Other disability/difficulty’ as their primary type of need have not been included in this analysis.

\(^{15}\) These data were downloaded (on 10 August 2019) and analysed from the GIAS government database (GOV.UK, 2019).
an overview of how safeguarding operates at residential schools, as set out both in statutory and non-statutory guidance as well as through inspection regimes.

In England, statutory guidance underpinning these responsibilities is set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (Department for Education, 2019a), which focuses on schools’ roles and *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department for Education, 2018b), which covers all professionals working with children, including schools.\(^\text{16}\)

*Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department for Education, 2018b) sets out the importance of providing early help to children when a concern is identified, rather than waiting and running the risk of a problem escalating. In order to identify children and families who would benefit from early help, local authorities are required to set up a coordinated approach across local organisations and agencies, including schools. An early help assessment can be conducted either by one organisation or several. If more than one organisation is involved (education, health and police, for example), a lead practitioner is identified on a case-by-case basis. This lead does not have to be a social worker – it could be a teacher, GP or other professional.

Local authorities are tasked with leading the statutory assessment of children defined as being in need (section 17, Children Act 1989) and child protection enquiries (section 47, Children Act 1989). Each local authority in England and Wales has to set out their approach in Child Protection Procedures which are published and updated on a six-monthly basis. They also publish a threshold document, which indicates the local criteria for action. It should be noted that unlike section 17 and section 47 enquiries, early help happens on a voluntary basis with family consent.

There are also three sets of non-statutory guidance of key relevance to this research:

- *Child sexual exploitation* (Department for Education, 2017), which is a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision-makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. It is suggested that this should be read alongside *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department for Education, 2018b) and local child protection procedures.

- *What to do if you are worried a child is being abused: Advice for practitioners* (Department for Education, 2015b) which is guidance to help those working with children to identify abuse and neglect and respond appropriately.

- *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges* (Department for Education, 2018a), which sets out advice for schools and colleges on how to prevent and respond to reports of sexual violence and harassment between children.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 that came into force in April 2016 provides the legal framework for social service provision in Wales. Regional safeguarding children boards, which include representatives from local authorities, police, health and probation, coordinate and ensure the effectiveness of work to protect and promote the welfare of children. They are responsible for local child protection policy, procedure and guidance. *All Wales Child Protection Procedures* (All Wales Child Protection Review Group, 2008) sets out guidance for multi-agency working, while *Keeping Learners Safe* (Welsh Government, 2015) focuses specifically on schools.

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\(^{16}\) Statutory guidance is guidance which must be followed unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so by relevant professionals.
In the school-focused guidance from both countries, there is an emphasis on the joint and shared responsibility of professionals working with children to play their part in safeguarding.

Department for Education guidance mandates that a number of key domains (for example, training and record-keeping) are covered in a school’s safeguarding policy. Updates to policies are required and policies should be published on school websites. It is the responsibility of the school leader(s) and governing body to ensure that the safeguarding requirements are in place and being upheld.

*Working Together to Safeguard Children* and the *All Wales Child Protection Procedures* emphasise the importance of partnership working and set out how this should happen.

- In England, Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), the bodies responsible for local safeguarding from 2006, were replaced in September 2019. In the new system, health, social services and the police are each designated ‘safeguarding partners’. They have a shared and equal responsibility to work together with the wider multi-agency team (including education) in local areas to put systems and processes in place to safeguard all children.

- The *All Wales Child Protection Procedures* set out guidance for the Local and Regional Safeguarding Children Boards across Wales, outlining the framework for practice and emphasising the importance of good partnership working between agencies.

A system for quality assuring and inspecting independent and maintained residential schools is in place in both England and Wales. Ensuring good safeguarding practice is a key part of any inspection process, which consists of two arms – education and residential care.

- **Education**: Independent schools that are members of the ISC are inspected by the government approved Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Those that are not members of the ISC are inspected by Ofsted. Maintained residential schools are inspected by Ofsted. In Wales, Estyn is the inspection body for all schools.

  The inspection bodies look at all aspects of a school. As well as educational achievements and progress made by students, leadership and management; safeguarding, behaviour and wellbeing are also considered.

- **Residential care provision**: In England, Ofsted inspect the residential element of all residential special schools and mainstream residential schools that are not members of the ISC. ISI is approved to inspect the boarding provision of mainstream schools that are members of the ISC. There are two sets of National Minimum Standards: one for Boarding Schools and one for Residential Special Schools. These set out the expectations underpinning the inspection framework, covering areas such as health and wellbeing; safety and child protection; promoting positive behaviour and relationships and staffing.

  Accommodation that children stay in for more than 295 days a year have to register as children’s homes with Ofsted. These settings must abide by The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the *Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards* (Department for Education 2015a).

  In Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales carries out the inspection role of residential schools (mainstream and special) using the regulations and national minimum standards made by the

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17 Children Act 2004, section 16e.
Safeguarding children from sexual abuse in residential schools

National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 underpins the approach in Wales. This piece of legislation aims to put the wellbeing of people who need support at the centre of service provision. This is reflected in the regulation and inspection processes carried out by Care Inspectorate Wales, which focus on service quality, improvement and meeting wellbeing needs.

2.3 Existing research

The current research on child sexual abuse in residential schools is limited, as highlighted in the literature review conducted by the Inquiry (Ward and Rodger, 2018). This focused mainly on literature published between 2000 and 2018, including academic journals, reports, books and ‘grey literature’. Whilst evidence about child sexual abuse in English and Welsh residential schools was the focus of the review, relevant literature from other parts of the UK as well as internationally was included due to the paucity of research in this area. What evidence there is highlights some areas that are common to residential schools and others that are specific to either mainstream or special residential schools (Ward and Rodger, 2018).

The literature review highlighted that residential schools are, by definition, closed communities that operate self-sufficiently and where students and staff live and work together. A number of risks were flagged, which included:

- There is the potential for questionable practice to become normalised. Staff may find it harder to challenge colleagues when they are living and working together.
- The level of access that school staff have to students in residential schools gives potential abusers more opportunity to perpetrate abuse than in day school settings.

The culture of a school is the context within which acceptable behaviours are established and communicated to children and staff. If these are inappropriate and go unchallenged, there is a heightened risk that children may experience abuse and both children and staff may find disclosing abuse more difficult. This is directly addressed in Keeping Children Safe in Education (Department for Education, 2019a), which states that abuse is abuse and should not be passed off as ‘banter’ or being ‘part of growing up’. The kind of masculine, hierarchical culture that traditionally existed in a boys’ boarding school can be particularly unhelpful in this context.

Children with SEND are acknowledged as being at greater risk of sexual abuse than non-disabled children. The Inquiry’s literature review (Ward and Rodger, 2018) set these risks out:

- Societal attitudes meaning that children with SEND are not seen as potential victims of sexual abuse and are either not believed or considered unreliable witnesses.
- Communication problems making it harder for these children to disclose.
- Reliance on others to provide intimate/personal care, which may be from multiple people and on a one-to-one basis.
- Children with SEND may be more trusting and less used to challenging figures in authority.
- This group are more likely to spend time away from their families, in institutions (like residential special schools) where the risk of abuse is higher.
CHAPTER 3: Understanding of what child sexual abuse is
This chapter discusses understanding of child sexual abuse from the perspectives of school staff, local authority staff, children and parents, highlighting similarities and differences between the groups. The chapter includes a discussion of how different types of child sexual abuse are operationalised and understood as well as areas that participants were more uncertain about. Children’s understanding of child sexual abuse was found to be varied and this chapter concludes with a discussion on key challenges in communicating complex and sensitive issues related to child sexual abuse with children, including those with SEND.

Summary

- Staff had a clear understanding of what the terms child sexual abuse and exploitation mean, children had less of an understanding about peer abuse or sexual exploitation, while parents’ understanding of child sexual abuse was narrowly focused on physical acts.

- All participants were less confident in their ability to identify abusive behaviour in the context of peer relationships, with understanding and ability to consent a particular concern for some children with SEND.

- With children in special schools, there were a range of additional complexities including cognitive and intellectual impairments that made it more difficult for staff to fully or consistently ensure children or young people understood what child sexual abuse is, and substantive variability in some children’s ability to enter into conversations about it with family, friends and school staff.

3.1 Defining child sexual abuse

School and local authority staff had a clear and expansive understanding of what constitutes child sexual abuse in theory. This understanding included child sexual exploitation, as well as specific forms of abuse such as physical or ‘contact’ abuse, online abuse (including image sharing and grooming), being shown inappropriate images (both online or offline), peer-on-peer abuse, intra-familial abuse and harmful sexual behaviour. School staff in particular spoke about child sexual abuse in its broadest sense, with some noting how its definition had changed over time, particularly due to advances in technology.

“It doesn’t have to be physical. It can be online, it can be sexting, it can be telephonic. I think it can even be verbal and being forced to engage in conversation which is of a really explicit sexual nature.”

Staff, mainstream school

Following an initial open discussion, children and parents were presented with a definition of child sexual abuse (provided by the NSPCC and included below) to facilitate discussion about their own awareness and understanding.18

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18 This definition has been adapted and streamlined from Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) to ensure it is accessible, clear and understood by participants. More information on framing definitions is included in Chapter 1.
Sexual abuse is defined as:

When a child is being made, asked or rewarded for doing anything with their body that frightens or worries them – or being made to do this to somebody else.

It can involve touching, kissing or being made to show private parts of the body, or being made to do this to another person. It can involve being shown inappropriate films of pictures in books, magazines, on TV, mobile phones or online.

Children from mainstream schools were generally able to discuss child sexual abuse in relatively broad terms. They spoke about physical abuse (‘touching’ and rape) without prompting, and some also identified verbal abuse (sexual comments) and online abuse (grooming and viewing/sharing child abuse images). They were especially clear on specific concepts such as online safety and consent, which they credited to school personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Children spoke about a range of different perpetrators of child sexual abuse which could include strangers, teachers, family members and peers, including people the same gender as the victim.

“It doesn't really matter what kind of relationship it is, whether it’s girl/girl, boy/boy or girl/boy. It [abuse] would still be the same thing, because it's still the same thing being done.”

Child, mainstream school

Importantly, children tended to think that abuse was ‘more serious’ when it was perpetrated by adults, and specifically school staff. They were less clear about the potential for image sharing and peer relationships to be abusive (see section 3.2).

Understanding among children in special schools varied depending on the range of needs of the children interviewed and on their ages. While some children discussed abuse in broadly the same terms as above, others were less able to define child sexual abuse or to articulate what ‘keeping safe’ meant.19 In some cases this was limited to, for example, describing that some parts of the body were private. Others discussed concepts such as ‘good and bad touch’.

Children aged 13 and over were also asked specifically about their understanding of child sexual exploitation. Compared with child sexual abuse, children’s awareness and understanding of child sexual exploitation was less robust. Some children described child sexual exploitation using words like ‘threats’, ‘blackmail’ and ‘bribery’. When prompted with a definition of child sexual exploitation, they felt that it was ‘definitely’ child sexual abuse. However, there were misunderstandings of child sexual exploitation too, discussed further in section 3.2.

Parents’ initial understanding of child sexual abuse was narrower than that of either staff or children and tended to focus on ‘physical’ forms of violence and abuse. When parents were presented with the definition they generally felt it was ‘as expected’ and comprehensive in its coverage. This was the case for parents of children in both mainstream and special schools.

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19 Researchers consulted school staff in preparation for interviews with children as to the kind of language that children would be familiar with. Where it was appropriate to discuss more abstract and sensitive concepts with children, they were asked about ‘child sexual abuse’ in those terms.
Some parents were surprised by the breadth of the definition, especially its inclusion of online-facilitated child sexual abuse; this was in clear contrast to children’s knowledge of this area. Online abuse had not featured in their own childhoods and was described by some as being something of which they had become aware only relatively recently.

As a result of both technology and the nature of online risk being less familiar to many parents, they were more likely to say that they found it challenging to understand, monitor or moderate children’s behaviour and interactions with new platforms and applications (discussed further in Chapter 4).

“I think a lot of it [abuse] is quite new stuff, it’s the cyber, the grooming […]. I think they [children] are exposed to things that we were never exposed to and have access to anything […] it’s extraordinary, and as a result massively difficult to protect children from because it is available 24/7 to anyone with a device.”

Parent, mainstream school

The inclusion of ‘being shown inappropriate content’ surprised some parents, because sharing sexualised images was considered so common among young people that parents had not always considered it to be child sexual abuse. Omissions from the definition were also surprising for some parents. For example, one parent thought that female genital mutilation (FGM) would have been referenced more explicitly.

3.2 Areas of uncertainty

Despite speaking confidently about theoretical definitions of child sexual abuse, school staff still spoke of ‘grey areas’, specifically in relation to putting their understanding of issues into practice. For example, staff were not always certain about boundaries between abusive and appropriate peer relationships. The fact that peer-on-peer issues were one of most frequently recorded concerns in the proforma gives an indication of the scale of the issue, though it seems apparent that staff were not always clear on how to handle these sorts of concerns.

“There are some situations in which it’s very clear, but when you’ve got two 14, 15-year-olds and you’ve got a girl who lacks confidence in herself and a boy who’s quite gauche and quite clumsy and stuff happens, and then the girl, a year later, thinks, ‘That was horrible, I hated that’, […] defining it as abuse sits uncomfortably with me […] as abuse is, in my mind, it’s a word that talks about something targeted, deliberate [whereas in this example] the harm is unintentional, even though it’s very real, I think.”

Staff, mainstream school

This uncertainty extended to how to interpret and respond to situations where young people were considered to be in relationships, but were under the age of 16. Similarly, it was not always easy for staff to make a judgement about whether incidents crossed a line from being acceptable to abusive in relation to image sharing. For young people with SEND, staff were also unclear about how to approach and support children in consensual sexual relationships, more detail on which is provided in Chapter 4.

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20 The age of consent to any sexual activity is 16 years old in England and Wales.
Staff were mindful that teachers touching pupils could be misinterpreted as abuse, particularly younger children who might be physically comforted by a staff member, or a disabled child who relies on a staff member to assist them with personal health or social care. Because students are living at residential schools, this is arguably an issue of particular pertinence to staff working in the boarding house settings. There were concerns about how staff could offer forms of comfort to distressed or unwell children in the residential setting, without inadvertently causing harm, elevating risk, or being open to censure. Staff from some special schools raised the issue of pupils becoming sexually aroused by teachers touching them appropriately, either when offering reassurance or responding to sensory needs. Staff felt this was an important part of their pastoral role, but one that required careful management to avoid allegations of abuse.

While accepting the breadth of the definition, there were parents who described physical forms of sexual abuse as more ‘clear-cut’ and contrasted this with forms of abuse that did not involve touch, and therefore felt harder to define as sexual abuse.

“[I]t’s quite easy to define, isn’t it, if somebody’s physically touched somebody? I think the grooming piece is a lot harder to establish. I don’t know. I think it’s a tough one, to be honest with you. I think the boundaries are quite broad now. I think in the past they’ve been quite clear, but I think now […] there’s a lot of grey area and it’s difficult, and it’s opinion isn’t it?”

Parent, mainstream school

Gaps in children’s knowledge centred on three areas. First, a topic of much debate in the focus groups was whether sexual relationships between peers ever constituted child sexual abuse, and if so in what circumstances. Discussions here centred on age and consent, with some children being very clear that legally, consent to sex cannot be given under the age of 16. However, the groups did distinguish between age appropriate and age inappropriate relationships, saying, for example, that if the two people in the relationship were 15 and both consented to sex, then this would not constitute child sexual abuse as they ‘can take responsibility for themselves’, in contrast to a sexual relationship involving a significant age gap.

Sexualised behaviour online was one of the most frequently recorded forms of concern in the proforma. However, there appeared to be some confusion around whether and how this related to child sexual abuse. If conceptualised as a spectrum, at one end were online incidents that were clearly seen as being child sexual abuse, such as intentional sexualised bullying or sharing child sexual abuse images. At the other end were incidents seen as less clear-cut, such as possession of mildly sexualised images of girls posing in sportswear. Staff from a mainstream school gave an example of boys sharing images of girls wearing bikinis on WhatsApp with their friends, without realising the seriousness of their actions. Similarly, a parent queried whether their child with SEND would know that sharing inappropriate images of themselves (in their underwear for example) with their school friends on WhatsApp was abusive.

Once again, consent was seen as key here. Children discussed an example (provided by researchers) of two peers under 16 in a relationship and consenting to making images together and sharing them with each other. This was not seen as child sexual abuse because it was a consensual activity. However, if one of the peers then shared the photos with others, this was felt to cross the line into abusive behaviour.
"If the girlfriend or boyfriend wants the nudes and the other partner is willing to give them and is not feeling forced, then obviously if they're underage it's still illegal, but it's not sexual abuse I don't think."

Child, mainstream school

As with the parents interviewed, some children were surprised at the inclusion of ‘being shown inappropriate content’ in the NSPCC definition of abuse. For some, this appeared to be because ‘being shown something’ did not meet a threshold of severity at which something would be considered abuse.

“Sexual abuse I would have thought is more something verbal or physical rather than just being shown something. I would have thought that would have been more mentally abusing rather than sexual [...] I don't know. I wouldn't have thought it would be 'sexual abuse'. I would have thought it would be more 'inappropriate'."

Child, mainstream school

Children were also surprised because image sharing was so common among young people, and because it was ‘easy’ for strangers to send them inappropriate content on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, suggesting that this had become a normalised experience. Some children questioned which scenarios involving inappropriate content other than image sharing would constitute child sexual abuse. For example, one child asked whether looking at a copy of Fifty Shades of Grey would fit the definition, and another had walked in on her sister watching an 18-rated film and asked whether that would be seen as child sexual abuse.

While some children were aware of child sexual exploitation in a broad sense, others had not heard the term before and/or did not know what it meant. Some children guessed at a definition, including it being the attempt to abuse (with child sexual abuse being the abuse itself), or it being abuse by an adult perpetrator. This lack of awareness and misunderstanding suggests more could be done to educate children about child sexual exploitation, including raising awareness of the signs of a young person being sexually exploited.

3.3 Challenges in developing children's understanding

Communicating the breadth and nuance of child sexual abuse was acknowledged as a challenging issue in school staff groups and was sometimes evident from children’s views on what child sexual abuse did and did not cover. As discussed in section 3.2, areas that were more challenging for children in mainstream schools to grasp and categorise as child sexual abuse included coercive peer relationships, sharing images of a sexualised nature and child sexual exploitation.

There were a range of additional complexities with children in special schools, including cognitive and intellectual impairments, that made it more difficult for staff to fully or consistently ensure children or young people understood what child sexual abuse is, and substantive variability in some children’s ability to enter into conversations about it with family, friends and school staff. Use of language and concepts such as ‘good and bad touch’ was reported by staff and children with SEND to help address this.
“You know when you’re best friends and bros? Normally you put your arm all around them; sometimes it could be a good touch, but sometimes they might find it uncomfortable, which is a bad touch [...] I learned about it, like, when I was in Year 3.”

Child, special school

Compounding these issues of understanding and comprehension was concern that for some children, sexual abuse had been normalised. This was raised by staff in a number of special schools but was also relevant to children with a significant history of sexual abuse, whatever their setting.

“It’s because of their socialisation [...] what they class as ‘normal’ actually might not be, but that might be the world they’re used to [...] They may well be prone to different types of abuse but may not even be able to recognise that it’s abnormal.”

Staff, special school

In addition, it is important to note here that it is parents, rather than children, that had the least inclusive and nuanced understanding of child sexual abuse. This suggests that schools may need to review the ways in which they engage parents in preventative, educational safeguarding work, more on which is outlined in Chapter 4.
This chapter describes the work schools reported undertaking in these areas, what they felt worked well, the barriers they experienced in preventing child sexual abuse, and explores the views held by school staff, children, local authority staff and parents about prevention work.

Summary

**Structural approaches**
- Schools’ governance structures monitored safeguarding practices. While participants felt they generally worked well, challenges could arise. For example, when a proprietor was distant from their school or where governors lacked experience in education and working with children.
- Despite meeting minimum standards for recruitment and vetting, staff from mainstream and special schools acknowledged that this was not a failsafe against appointing someone seeking to abuse children.

**Education and training**
- Training was delivered to all staff employed by the schools. However, external staff did not always have access to core safeguarding training.
- Staff perceived education and awareness-raising with children to be part of the preventative work undertaken in residential schools. A key challenge in supporting children to build their understanding of child sexual abuse was determining the right age and developmental phase for material to be introduced.

**Situational approaches**
- School staff also described forms of physical management of children by gender and age to keep them safe, ensure healthy boundaries between them and offer privacy when needed.
- Management of the physical environment was felt to be particularly challenging in the residential context due to the constant and extensive nature of the task. In some special schools, there was a more active management of all space to effectively safeguard children.
- Monitoring devices and internet access was perceived to be key to preventing some forms of child sexual abuse. Despite having clear policies, schools found it difficult to effectively manage prevention activities in this rapidly-changing context.

**Relationships**
- Promoting open and trusting relationships was another key way in which staff described preventative work and helped give children confidence to seek advice or support when needed.

**Culture**
- A culture of safeguarding in schools was underpinned by the four prevention approaches above. Participants also recognised that child sexual abuse can still occur despite preventative measures, and that safeguarding is the responsibility of all adults in a residential school community.
4.1 Overview of school approaches to prevention of child sexual abuse

Prevention work was multi-faceted and included awareness-raising, education and training of staff, students and parents. This was both supported and underpinned by a strong ‘safeguarding culture’ within schools. Within this chapter, prevention work has been grouped into four overarching categories as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

It is important to note that some of the prevention work discussed in this chapter overlaps with the identification and disclosure of child sexual abuse (discussed in Chapter 5): for example, training and education and promoting positive relationships. For the sake of brevity, these are discussed here and not in the following chapter.
4.2 Structural approaches

Structural approaches to preventing child sexual abuse included governance, local authority monitoring and oversight, recruitment approaches and staff induction.

4.2.1 School governance

Schools were clear that their governance structures had checking and balancing responsibility for safeguarding, from prevention through to identification of child sexual abuse and schools’ responses to concerns. Though considered sound in principle, three weaknesses of this system were identified. These were when a proprietor was distant from their (independent) school, either geographically or in their level of involvement; where governors lacked experience in education and working with children; or where multi-academy trusts had trust boards as well as local governing bodies. Here, the risk of safeguarding issues ‘falling between the gaps’ arose from a potentially unclear division of responsibilities that naturally have a degree of overlap.

4.2.2 Local authority monitoring and oversight

Local authorities and residential schools had different kinds of relationships depending on governance arrangements, the type of schools and whether local authorities had children placed there. Local authorities discussed their involvement in monitoring schools, sharing information, raising awareness among staff and providing training to residential schools. The purpose of their work is to ensure that schools are equipped to prevent child sexual abuse as well as to identify it and respond to it.

Local authorities that commissioned residential education provision for children (both in and outside their own borough) carried out a range of monitoring activities. This included contract monitoring meetings, where safeguarding arrangements and children’s progress were assessed to ensure the provision was of a high quality.

Some local authorities also discussed carrying out a broader auditing process of all schools, including residential schools, in their area. These monitoring activities focused on reviewing school policies and processes, rather than assessing the delivery of child sexual abuse preventative work. For example, one LSCB asked all schools in the area to complete a Section 175/157 Safeguarding Self-Assessment and judge themselves against a number of descriptors. These included child protection and safeguarding policies, multi-agency working arrangements, attendance at child protection conferences and approaches to teaching certain subjects, for example, online safety. Local authorities used information they collected through these audits to support understanding of key and emerging issues in the area and to tailor the training and support they offered schools.

While these sorts of monitoring processes were perceived to work well in some areas, local authority participants explained that not all residential schools were supportive of data collection activities.

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21 Section 175/157 of the Education Act 2002 introduced a duty on local authorities and governing bodies of maintained schools to ensure that they safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
4.2.3 Local authority support for schools' safeguarding approaches

Local authority participants described offering all schools in their areas access to local safeguarding and education networks to develop and support safeguarding practice. Networks included quarterly LSCB education hub meetings, designated safeguarding lead networks with designated safeguarding leads and head teachers, and education safeguarding networks. Local authority participants reported that networks benefited schools by providing updated information on safeguarding policies, and access to other residential schools and local safeguarding partners, such as family services. However, these networks were not always highlighted by school staff when discussing their safeguarding practice in focus groups. Instead, one mainstream school described the value of a “tight network of Designated Safeguarding Leads from local independent schools” that shared information.

4.2.4 Staff recruitment

The Department for Education’s *Keeping children safe in education* (2019a) sets out the regulatory requirements on staff recruitment and emphasises the importance of safer recruitment:

> Paragraph 115. *It is vital that schools and colleges create a culture of safe recruitment and, as part of that, adopt recruitment procedures that help deter, reject or identify people who might abuse children.*

The regulatory requirements for safer recruitment include ensuring all staff are DBS checked, that other relevant checks are carried out (varying by role), and that references are obtained before employment. Local authority participants highlighted the importance of safer recruitment in preventing child sexual abuse across all schools.

Senior staff in schools described meeting the requirements and emphasised that safeguarding was at the forefront of their recruitment approach from the earliest stages – for example, by emphasising the importance of safeguarding in job adverts. Schools acknowledged too that, while crucial, DBS checks did not provide failsafe certainty that a candidate would not abuse children.

Some schools carried out additional recruitment processes that were felt to go beyond the minimum requirements and included:

- requiring two or three satisfactory references, rather than just using a reference from the candidate’s most recent employer;
- checking applicants’ employment history, including time spent overseas, which in some schools meant excluding those with unexplained gaps in or unusually frequent changes of employment prior to shortlisting;
- addressing safeguarding in recruitment interviews, by asking questions with a safeguarding focus or having members of staff trained in safer recruitment on interview panels. In a special school, a head teacher described considering panel members’ ‘gut feeling’ about interviewees as an additional check.

The length of time involved in pre-employment checks and vetting meant a risk of losing potentially good staff. This was an issue especially in lower paid care roles at special schools – potential employees might be applying for multiple roles and would often need to take the first job they were offered. In rural schools, senior staff described how the pool of potential candidates, again especially for lower paid care work, would be limited.
Safeguarding children from sexual abuse in residential schools

“It can mean that, because it can take months sometimes to do a proper vet before we get anybody in, that we have lost staff in the past because they just didn’t want to wait that long.”
Staff, special school

The safer recruitment approaches that supported the prevention of child sexual abuse were also described as resource intensive. This could be more challenging for schools if they experienced a higher level of staff turnover – something described by one special school.

Some schools used agency staff to cover staff shortages, with the agency conducting the appropriate vetting. Other schools avoided the use of agency staff partly because they could not themselves verify that safer recruitment practices had been followed.

4.2.5 Induction

Staff induction varied across schools. In some, reviewing relevant policies and completing safeguarding training modules online were required before new starters began. At others, face-to-face statutory safeguarding training was delivered on their first day.

“When you’re new and you just start, there’s a real emphasis on the induction [...] you get as much training [as possible], especially child protection, safeguarding: they’re done before you actually start working with the kids.”
Staff, special school

Local authorities felt that school staff should initially be supervised before working alone with children. In some special schools, trial periods or shadowing of experienced staff were integrated into the induction process. For example, observing care staff to learn how best to bathe a child who required support with personal care.

New staff were also given dedicated time to read policies and familiarise themselves with information about the school, including safeguarding practices. However, it could be challenging for new staff members to engage with a large amount of information at once. For example, one member of care support staff recalled reading their school’s policies and procedures for four consecutive days, which he described as a "massive information overload". This indicates a potential risk to the efficacy of safeguarding induction.

4.3 Training, education and awareness

All schools trained staff and educated children to develop their awareness around sex, relationships and abuse. This was considered preventative work to help children identify and navigate risks (including online) and recognise inappropriate or abusive interactions with peers and adults. Training and education of both staff and children was seen as key to underpinning a culture of prevention across schools. The following sections look at the content of training and education, any delivery issues and views on efficacy. Discussion of staff training is followed by the education delivered to children.

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22 Schools discussed the range of preventative educational work they undertook with children, outlined in more detail in sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3. Raising awareness of potential risks in relation to child sexual abuse was one strand of a multifaceted approach to keeping children safe. It does not imply that children are in any way to blame for child sexual abuse.
4.3.1 Training for schools

**Training designated safeguarding leads and senior staff**

Staff training was a key aspect of schools’ prevention work across all settings. School staff and local authorities said that safeguarding leads – head teachers and designated safeguarding leads – undertook specialist external training every two years in line with *Keeping children safe in education* guidance. Local authorities described regularly delivering mandatory training on leading and managing safeguarding in schools, as well as core multi-agency training covering child protection referral, assessment and intervention processes. Attendance of training was assessed in local authority audits of schools’ safeguarding practice which schools of all kinds were invited to respond to.

Local authorities discussed the importance of tailoring training to ensure it was fit for purpose and met schools’ needs. Local authority staff also discussed employing learning from other schools and incorporating lessons from case and practice reviews into their training. It was acknowledged, for example, that training would need to address that children live on-site and are in the care of staff for much longer periods of time, which is different to a non-residential context. While these issues may be similar across residential and non-residential settings, staff in residential schools arguably play a greater role in identifying and responding to incidents due to the increased amount of contact and time spent with children in their care.

“If you’ve got young people who are living on-site, then obviously that brings some other issues that you need to focus on, [...] particularly things around safe working practice around the fact that staff will be acting in a pastoral role and young people are actually living on the premises.”

Local authority

In addition, it was acknowledged that training needed to emphasise risks around the blurring of lines between professional and over-familiar relationships, which could arise as a result of the increased time staff and children spend together in residential settings.

“The boundary between a professional relationship in a residential setting, and [an] overfamiliar [one ...] is where a lot of the risks lie.”

Staff, mainstream school

Designated safeguarding leads felt the scope of their role and time spent on preventative safeguarding work had increased substantially in line with emerging understanding of child sexual abuse. They raised the potential need to professionalise the role further, reduce teaching duties to accommodate the safeguarding workload effectively and provide support for the emotional impact of the role.

**Training school staff**

Across all the schools included in the qualitative research, safeguarding training was delivered to a wide range of people directly employed by the school, including school staff whose contact with children was more incidental to their role, such as caretakers, cleaners, catering staff, office and IT staff and governors. Participants mentioned a range of training opportunities, as set out in Table 4.1, though not all were taken up by every school.
Table 4.1: Training opportunities for school staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External training</th>
<th>In-school training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual refresher sessions of standard local authority safeguarding training</td>
<td>Termly internal training sometimes delivered as part of INSET programme. Examples included refresher training for staff leading trips, or training targeted at particular groups of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority training updates on specific topics including female genital mutilation, peer-on-peer abuse, sexting* and e-safety</td>
<td>Monthly sessions tailored to school population. Examples included training from specialist staff on safeguarding and children with specific SEND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of online modules for NSPCC accreditation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The term ‘sexting’ is used throughout this report to refer to the sharing of sexualised images, including sexualised selfies and sharing images between peers, also known as ‘youth-produced sexual imagery’. As explored in Chapter 3 and later sections, this term was discussed by participants as a ‘grey area’ which could but did not always constitute child sexual abuse.

While the exact coverage of schools’ safeguarding training varied, participants across the schools reported that fundamental messages about safeguarding were consistently communicated. Key amongst these was that it was not the responsibility of children and young people to disclose child sexual abuse. Rather, staff need to be aware of the potential signs of child sexual abuse and take appropriate action where necessary. This involved paying attention to changes in children’s behaviour and presentation and sharing low-level ‘niggling doubts’ as well as more clear-cut concerns.

Designated safeguarding leads identified challenges to delivering high-quality training across all staff types in residential settings. These were:

- Practical challenges timetabling all staff with a particular role to attend annual training together. Shift patterns were one reason for this. One staff participant reported delivering training in the evenings and weekends to get around this problem.
- Ensuring efficacy across all staff groups in developing a ‘report all concerns’ culture. Staff seniority and hierarchical structures were felt to make it more difficult to empower staff in particularly junior, peripheral or ancillary roles to report concerns about senior colleagues.
- Engaging staff in training who work in multiple schools or across different sites. For example, music teachers who often give one-to-one lessons. They are required to attend training in all schools which can mean eight to ten different sets of annual safeguarding training. The possibility of being able to streamline training in these circumstances was raised.
- Ensuring the level of training and subsequent approach to safeguarding is consistent across staff groups. An example was where sports staff in one school had been given a less detailed version of training. The school was planning additional training to bring sports staff training up to the same level delivered to pastoral care staff in residential boarding houses.

23 It is likely that the reported challenges were also relevant to staff working in non-residential settings, though participants did not make this comparison.
Training staff not directly employed by the school

Training of external support staff, such as local authority transport employees, was less consistent across settings (it is worth noting that some of the incidents reported in the online proforma took place on school transport. At some schools, participants were not aware of training for external support staff, while in others, staff reported that they received training outside of the school. In one case, external support staff were expected to complete components of the school’s own safeguarding training. Where services were commissioned into the school by external agencies, a service agreement might mean the school is reliant on the staff member’s employer to have provided safeguarding training.

Some designated safeguarding leads described specific approaches for managing the presence of external and contractual staff on site. In one school, all contractors on the school premises were required to watch a 10-minute safeguarding video before the start of their contract. This made clear the behaviour expected of them and asked contractors to be mindful that the school was a home for the children resident there and, as such, respecting privacy was key.

Another school used a system of coloured lanyards and visitor badges worn by anyone outside the staff group who might be on school premises. The colour system showed the level of training, checking and clearing these visitors had to be around children. School staff were briefed to challenge anyone with a lanyard or badge that indicated they should be escorted on school premises but appeared not to be.

Efficacy of different training approaches

Views on the usefulness of local authority training approaches were mixed. For example, some felt that local authority training using past incidents to illustrate safeguarding scenarios brought them to life in a way that was hard-hitting, memorable and emphasised the fundamental message that staff should share any concerns they identified. Others, however, felt that this kind of training was limited to demonstrating the dangers of ineffective safeguarding, rather than exploring solutions and good practice approaches.

“Just hearing the story and what happened is not really training people or informing people. It’s like reading a bad newspaper.”

Staff, mainstream school

Another view was that, because the fundamentals of safeguarding did not change, the core staff training was little more than a reminder for those staff who had been in post for a long time, rather than enabling them to gain insight or learn new approaches. Staff suggested that refresher sessions could be shorter and more tailored to staff who have been in role for a certain number of years, to maintain focus and ensure staff did not ‘switch off’. Suggestions for more engaging delivery included discussion and RAG rating (red, amber, green) of scenarios with colleagues, provision of data on a wider range of geographic areas (to cover the home regions of the student body), and involvement of different trainers in delivery rather than using the same people every year.

While generally the core training was seen as valuable for new recruits, there were also suggestions about how it could be improved specifically for them. Examples included the potential to increase the use of exercises and providing more detail for house staff who worked with children in loco parentis. For example, a member of care staff in a special school described how they would have liked more early training and induction work to help them understand the full scope of their role, what it would entail (round-the-clock care, for example) and the scope of safeguarding work associated with this. Another suggested approach was to use case studies with all staff working in boarding houses and
healthcare staff such as matrons, to discuss what they should do in a particular situation, capitalising on their ability to interact and learn from each other.

Views on the usefulness of external rather than internal providers were also mixed. One was that external trainers helped to emphasise the importance of safeguarding and lent additional weight to the message that the school would treat all concerns seriously. External provision was also felt to help broaden the school’s understanding of safeguarding, and that changing providers could help to keep training sessions feeling ‘fresh’.

“The danger with internal ones is that you become too focused on what your typical cases are within that context and may forget to look at other things. There’s scope with an external agency, done well, to raise your awareness of things that you might have forgotten to look for.”

Staff, mainstream school

However, some participants questioned the value of external training, due to the inability to tailor content to specific settings, or to roles within that setting. This particularly applied to compulsory local authority training. Some schools felt that their internal expertise exceeded that of external trainers – this included, for example, some special schools who delivered specialist support to children and young people with high levels of health and social care need. In one of these schools, the team had decided to introduce focused monthly sessions to supplement the more universal safeguarding training delivered each year. Some designated safeguarding leads felt that training provided by them in person meant that all staff had met them and could ‘put a face to the name’, which could, in turn, support staff in reporting concerns.

Ensuring safeguarding training was of sufficient quality and its content tailored to the specific school context was key to making training effective; this was something staff participants felt did not always happen, particularly in relation to training provided by their local authorities. However, local authorities discussed a range of mechanisms they used to support and improve the training they provided, including focusing on specific issues (for example, harmful sexual behaviour) and having a feedback loop to ensure training could be adapted in line with suggestions for improvement.

Finally, participants whose core training was delivered online noted the challenge of competing time pressures on ensuring they accessed and completed this.

4.3.2 Raising children’s awareness of child sexual abuse

Children were taught about keeping safe online, having respectful relationships, recognising abuse and reporting concerns to adults, which was perceived to be an important aspect of preventative work taking place in schools. As highlighted in section 4.3.1, good practice centred on staff being actively aware and sensitive to signs of safeguarding risks or incidents, rather than relying on children’s disclosure. In addition, good practice also included ensuring approaches to enable and support a child to recognise and discuss concerns and experiences.

Work to raise children’s awareness was carried out in school in various group and one-to-one settings: through assemblies or performances; in PSHE curriculums; through small group discussions and in one-to-one teaching in special schools. Some schools reinforced messages to children using visual displays around the school.
In mainstream and special schools, a foundation of basic understanding about school rules and what would and would not be considered appropriate behaviour (for example, learning to respect other children's privacy and not entering staff accommodation) underpinned work that dealt specifically with relationships, sex and sexual abuse.

“There’s […] general guidance given, before we hone in to the specifics, just about the attitudes and values and expectations of just being a pupil here […] In many ways, that forms the bedrock of the preventative measures, and then you come [on] to some of the specifics that you might have […] like behaving inappropriately in a sexual nature […] through the […] PSHE programme.”

Staff, mainstream school

In mainstream schools, and for some in special schools, children were also taught about more complex concepts and different kinds of abuse (for example, sexual exploitation, trafficking, peer-on-peer abuse) and how to recognise them. Schools educated children on online safety too. More sophisticated discussions covered issues such as grooming.

As well as planned education or awareness-raising, staff across all schools discussed ad hoc responses to issues raised by children or to specific situations. Examples included care staff repeating messages about online safety while monitoring children using the internet and initiating targeted discussions with children who had demonstrated concerning behaviour or were known to be in a more vulnerable situation or circumstances where there might be an increased risk. This could include children entering a new relationship, for example where children under the age of 16 might engage in sexual activity.

Some local authority participants felt that they could undertake more proactive work with residential schools. To ensure resources could be targeted most effectively, some local authority participants wanted to know more about what help residential schools would want in relation to their work around child sexual abuse. They also wanted more information about the sorts of approaches, activities and awareness-raising work that would have the biggest impact with groups of children and parents.

As highlighted previously, it is likely this learning and information would be relevant across residential and non-residential settings.

“I would like to see more evidence-based programmes of education for children and young people around child sexual abuse, because I think there is still this concern around might it cause offence, at what age, etc., and actually what’s the evidence telling us is the best way to educate children and young people for them to be able to recognise what’s happening to them shouldn’t be happening?”

Local authority

Age and developmental phase

The content and complexity of the messages given to children varied according to their age (in mainstream schools and some special school settings) and, in relation to special schools, levels of comprehension. This is because more of the children attending special schools have a developmental delay, significant complex learning disabilities or cognitive differences.

In special schools for children who have learning disabilities, autism, and complex or multiple needs, assessing ability and tailoring education to the individual was key. Coverage depended on children’s ability to understand the messages they were being given, the extent to which they could identify this in social relationships, as well as responding to specific incidents or experiences. This included,
for example, discussion around consent, which was one of the most consistently-addressed topics throughout all years in mainstream schools and discussed with older age groups in special schools.

“We try and tailor it to fit the needs and the understanding of the young people within those environments that they’re in […] so [one] class have got a lot more understanding so therefore you can have more in-depth conversations about e-safety and sexual exploitation and grooming and things […] whereas [if] you did that in the [another] class, it would have no impact whatsoever because they wouldn’t be able to understand […] It’s more a case of, “This is okay, this is not okay … It’s not appropriate to take your clothes off here […], but you can in your bedroom” – that kind of thing."

Staff, special school

Some staff expressed concern that this need to tailor safeguarding education to age and level of understanding might mean that some children with SEND were not able to take on board protective concepts and information early enough to mitigate all risks that they might face. As previously mentioned, however, schools did not intend to place sole responsibility on children to protect themselves; the work schools did to educate and raise awareness of risks among children was only one strand of preventative work.

“It’s one of the biggest frustrations, […] trying to deliver that concept to the right age groups but making it accessible […]. So, an example [is the applied theatre] performance: within mainstream they’re targeting Year 8s […] despite our work and efforts to make it an accessible performance, we’ve only ever delivered [it to …] Year 9 [and above] here, and to be perfectly honest, I think it’s really the Year 10s that gained the most.”

Staff, special school

Online activities that might present child sexual abuse risks were a particular concern. For example, some children and parents suggested that the timing of messaging around online safety and image sharing was not aligned with the point at which children had access to the internet or to their own phones, which could leave them at risk of engaging inappropriately. For example, some children said that most of their peers had owned mobile phones since primary school, but they could not recall having been taught specifically about risks of sending nude pictures to peers until year 10. This suggests, in line with the concerns of some staff, that education content may not always have been well targeted, with both children and parents suggesting that more detailed awareness-raising should be undertaken with younger children.

Information that children with specific types of SEND (for example, limited cognitive ability) would be taught included ideas about the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch and what is public and private (in relation to behaviour, bodies, and physical space, for example). Staff also said that children were taught basic sex education. Examples included the difference between boys and girls, which parts of the body are private, and what would be appropriate behaviour with specific friends or family members.

Staff explained that it was a more extensive task to build understanding among children who developed knowledge or skills later than their peers, and/or had more complex needs, than those in other special schools or mainstream education. Staff described working to foster children's self-esteem, assertiveness, and personal care skills; manage problematic or risky behaviours (such as taking clothes
off in public); and develop their understanding of everyday boundaries and appropriate behaviour. One example was teaching children to 'high five' as a greeting rather than try to hug or kiss anyone they encountered.

As discussed in Chapter 3, some special schools were also aware they were working with students who had experienced abuse earlier in their childhood. Experiences of abuse could impact on how a child understood a 'normal' relationship. Schools described addressing such issues one-to-one, often in a therapeutic context, tailored to the specific child's ways of understanding relationships and the world around them.

4.3.3 What works in education approaches with children and young people

Staff and children felt that schools should have a range of approaches to engage children on child sexual abuse appropriately at different time points and with varying levels of detail. Schools were keen to ensure messages were accessible and engaging. Children, staff and parents discussed their views of efficacy and suggested improvements to the existing offer. The following sections look at these suggestions thematically across participant groups.

**Tackling sensitive issues openly and 'head-on'**

A bold delivery approach to education was viewed by schools and children as important. Students wanted their schools to tackle issues 'head on' and be transparent with them about what they needed to know. This open culture was perceived to empower children, enabling them to feel safe and comfortable to raise issues for discussion.

Some parents also felt schools should use more direct terminology around child sexual abuse and share information on potential consequences, so that children have an awareness of what might happen to them if they shared a naked image among their peer group, for example.

Delivering more positive and empowering messaging around consent was thought to be especially important where there were cultural differences between children. Furthermore, staff felt that children from certain cultural and religious backgrounds might find it harder to talk about issues of child sexual abuse due to specific cultural norms and values. These were thought to present challenges to the way in which staff communicated sensitive issues and the extent to which children might share information.

> "Boys in boarding from West Africa, their families tend to be closed […] The boys tend to not tell us things which you would hope that they would in terms of disclosures."

Staff, mainstream school

Perceptions of hierarchies between men and women were complexities which should be acknowledged and addressed openly when teaching on these issues.

**Ensuring education reflects diversity in gender, sexuality and types of abuse**

Some staff felt that the sex education programmes in their schools were overly heteronormative. These staff felt that child sexual abuse education should be broadened to include more LGBTQIA+ teaching and examples that were accessible to a larger pool of children.
Children felt that safeguarding content focused on ‘the basic scenario’, which they understood to be girls being abused by adult male perpetrators. They noted that this excluded the risks posed to boys, the risks female perpetrators posed to children of both sexes, and risks of abuse by young people themselves.

“It was kind of the basic scenario that we were taught [...] I think that with awareness talks and things there should be more viewpoints explored, instead of giving the basic examples [...] saying, ‘If a strange man approaches you, you must run away from him’ [...] What about a woman?”

Child, mainstream school

**Including informal discussions with peers**

Discussion with peers offered children opportunities to discuss issues openly and hear about others’ views, which might help to challenge misinformation. Children found these discussions engaging and valued sharing experiences which they felt some teachers might not relate to.

“[W]hen everyone’s talking about it and it’s more discussed, other things come up. You learn more [...] it’s quite easy to just ignore a video and just mindlessly watch it, whereas with the discussion you’re encouraged to input as well, which means you have to listen to everyone else.”

Child, mainstream school

**Enabling context-led or responsive discussion**

In mainstream and special schools, staff noted that children might raise these topics outside the classroom and when they felt relaxed. This was partly due to the residential nature of their schooling, during which children spend more time with staff in different (including non-educational) contexts, increasing opportunities for these kinds of discussions. Examples included children with SEND talking to a keyworker outside their cubicle about their body while showering, and in boarding houses where children might feel more comfortable and relaxed talking about sensitive subjects with familiar staff.

“I think we were playing pool [...] It was a very informal time – and you get that: when the children are more relaxed, they do talk a little bit more free and open.”

Staff, special school

Special schools used more ad hoc or informal teaching methods to reinforce messages and learning. This sort of awareness-raising was often delivered by care staff and teaching assistants who supported children with SEND to have conversations at times that were appropriate for the child. This was perceived to be a softer approach to more challenging or sensitive topics for these children as relevant messages were given in an appropriate and tailored way when children might be most receptive.

**Reinforcing learning through repetition**

Staff felt it was important to facilitate ongoing conversations about child sexual abuse via different routes and through a range of staff to ensure children became familiar with key messages. They hoped this approach would reinforce attitudes and values and equip children with requisite skills and information if a situation arose. However, children noted that this approach could prohibit learning if children became disengaged or stopped listening.
“Because we do have so many talks, by the time you get to the end of school you’re like, ‘Okay, I get it’ […] There’s only so many times you can be told […] once you get to a certain age, they’ve said what they can say. Whether you listen to it is one thing, but it’s not like you haven’t been told.”

Child, mainstream school

In special schools, staff noted that reinforcing learning in this way could take years rather than weeks or months. For example, educating children with particular forms of autism could pose particular challenges in situations where it was felt that they were less able to safely assess the risks in their own and others’ behaviour.

“I think a couple of them are so unaware of the dangers of it [image sharing]. It [training on online safety and relationships] is done, but it is difficult then because of the learning needs of some of them. You teach it over and over and then you revisit it six months later, actually, what do they recall? How much of it have they taken in that was real, or how much have they still got of their previous [thinking]?”

Staff, special school

Who delivers education?
Talks and presentations by external speakers were valued in both mainstream and special schools and viewed as less ‘embarrassing’ than hearing from teachers and other adults that were well known to children.

Special schools placed much more emphasis on one-to-one delivery through trusted members of staff to ensure messages were clearly understood by individual children. Any previous experiences of abuse were also taken into account when considering how best to support each child.

Using engaging and tailored material
Delivering information in an engaging way was seen as best practice – for example, bringing in short dramatic productions rather than more formal approaches delivered by teachers. Children felt that dramatic or storytelling approaches helped operationalise messages and enabled children to empathise with how they might have felt or acted if they were in a similar situation.

“I think that [talks/lectures] works for a lot of people, but it’s not always the best way to get through, particularly to young people. It’s like talking at them doesn’t work, which is why I think they put on the play and stuff, to almost show rather than tell.”

Child, special school

In special schools, staff described using adapted resources and approaches to teach on topics related to child sexual abuse so that students with specific needs could more accessibly engage with the content and information being provided. Examples included use of visual aids such as pictograms and display boards where children could move pictures to indicate specific moods.
4.4 Situational approaches

There were three main areas that schools focused on in managing the school environment which were perceived to support preventative safeguarding work: the management of devices and internet access, management of physical space, and monitoring of students. Managing these situations and setting clear expectations of staff and children contributed to a positive preventative culture.

4.4.1 Management of devices and internet access

The use of devices and social media was felt to be a significant and growing challenge for effective safeguarding practice in residential schools. Concerns around online-facilitated child sexual abuse centred on the easy access children had to communicate with adults and strangers via social media and online games, as well as image sharing between children.

Schools described a range of approaches to managing phone and online access which depended on the context, and children’s needs and abilities. For example, mainstream schools described how internet and device access was ‘age-graded’ to give older children more responsibility through increasing access to devices and the internet. In one special school, increasing access to devices and use of the internet linked to a structured behaviour management system: where children demonstrated they were capable of appropriate conduct, they were given more independence and freedom.

Schools also described a range of approaches which helped ensure appropriate and safe use of internet access. These included:

- Limited access to devices at certain times (for example, overnight where there was less direct staff supervision) and to sites deemed inappropriate (for example, YouTube and TikTok).
  Practically, schools did this by removing phones and tablets overnight and monitoring how children used devices.

  “They are not allowed on social media. Their devices are checked regularly and any social media apps are removed. He’s not allowed on Instagram or any of those sort of things.”

  Parent, mainstream school

- IT monitoring systems which filter content and flag attempts to access inappropriate sites.

- Physical monitoring of access, such as staff in the same room and watching children using devices.

Staff explained that school rules to help manage internet and device access were usually very clear. However, views on how well policies worked in practice were mixed. A key reason for this was because staff found policing access challenging due to the range of devices children had and their computer literacy, which often exceeded the knowledge of staff. For example, staff described how children would use virtual private networks (VPNs) and 4G on their mobile phones to circumvent the school’s network restrictions and access content that would have been restricted.

  “The kids don’t care […] they’re open about it. […] [T]hey log on to the VPN as I sit next to them doing the register […] in boarding or whatever and there’s no real stopping that.”

  Staff, mainstream school
There was also a sense among staff in some schools that rules were difficult to enforce because they were different from children's access outside of school. Some parents were described as unhelpfully permissive or unaware of the ways their children used technology. Parents believed that it was important for children to learn how to use the internet safely so that these skills could be brought into contexts outside of school. Cooperation between schools and parents in delivering and supporting this approach was perceived to be particularly important in the residential context where school staff spend more time in loco parentis enforcing safe use of the internet and devices.

Conversely, managing access to devices and the internet was considered less challenging in some special schools, especially where individual online and digital content and navigation was limited by the child’s ability or the platform was inaccessible to the child. Some staff explained that this was partly due to some children being more naïve about, or seemingly lacking an interest in, content of a sexual nature. Where children with SEND could use devices, staff explained that they were closely monitored to ensure they were always used safely. This included physical monitoring of all screen time to a much greater extent than appeared to be the case in mainstream schools.

Staff in special schools discussed whether they had struck the right balance between safeguarding and supporting children to develop independence. In one special school, staff raised a concern that they were not adequately equipping young people with the skills they would need when they left their school for whatever living situation followed. However, for some staff, safeguarding was a higher priority and increasing independent use of internet and devices introduced an unacceptable level of risk.

### 4.4.2 Management of physical space

Data reported in the proforma found that a high proportion of concerns took place on school or residential premises across both mainstream and special schools, highlighting a need for some sort of physical management of space (especially in bedrooms and bathrooms, for example). This was felt to help keep children safe, support healthy boundaries, and offer privacy when needed. In mixed schools, children were very clear on the rules about single sex spaces within the school and understood there to be serious consequences if they were found in, for example, a boyfriend or girlfriend’s bedroom.

However, schools also discussed the management of physical space to prevent same-sex peer-on-peer abuse, including sexual bullying among boys. Approaches included providing individual lockable showers, rather than group washing facilities. This was considered a particular challenge and there was a sense from both staff and parents that risks arising from same sex settings were perhaps not considered as fully as they could have been.

>“I think the viewing of this issue [...] is incredibly backward and outdated – [...] that boys boarding together is [considered] fine, girls boarding together is fine, but mixed is not fine – firstly, from the point of view of the sexuality spectrum, but also from the point of view of [that] boys together is probably almost even worse [...] in terms of sexual bullying.”

Staff, mainstream school
Staff explained that established relationships between children were also considered when making decisions about boarding arrangements to avoid unnecessary risk where possible. This included a range of potential behavioural and safeguarding issues. For example, if a concern had previously been identified involving two children, a decision might be taken for them to share a room with different children or have their own bedrooms, if possible.

Across all schools, staff explained that adults would be present in or around shared spaces and children were generally encouraged to spend time together in communal rather than private areas. In mainstream settings, staff discussed undertaking periodic checks of shared spaces such as changing rooms and school grounds. Areas of higher risk had been identified by some schools in contextual safeguarding audits of their buildings and other spaces.

> "Things like swimming changing rooms [...] It’s walkthroughs in pairs [...] you knock on the door [and] walk through, on regular timings [...] It’s getting to toilets, which were a blackspot here, and now going in pairs [to check]."

Staff, mainstream school

For children with SEND, however, there seemed to be a more active management of shared and private spaces to ensure their safety. Examples included children being allowed to go into each other’s rooms for a specific purpose (to read a book, for example), only when a support worker was present or nearby. In one school, staff described logs in every boarding house’s communal space in which staff were expected to note all entry and exit times, which children were present, and a summary of any interactions. This gave a full audit of all events in shared spaces.

The management of physical spaces also included the private spaces of staff, which students were generally not permitted to access. Equally, it was not seen as appropriate for staff to enter children’s bedrooms alone at night. Staff and children were clear that these boundaries should be maintained for two reasons; firstly, to protect children from abuse from staff and secondly, to ensure no false allegations could be made about staff abusing children.

Designated safeguarding leads described needing to ensure that boarding and residential care staff developed ‘sound professional judgement’ to manage situations and to prevent risks. An example was given of a student approaching a member of staff and asking to shut the door to discuss an issue that was private and sensitive. Designated safeguarding leads discussed the importance of staff in this situation being able to balance the child’s desire for privacy with minimising the risk of false allegation and of the child feeling unsafe. Designated safeguarding leads identified good practice such as staff ensuring they were visible to others while not allowing others to hear the conversation.

The risk of false allegations by children was discussed by staff across different school settings. It was clear that some individuals found this challenging to navigate, especially in situations where children were upset or distressed. An example was given when a member of staff hesitated about entering a child’s bedroom alone when the child was being sick. Appropriately managing this is an important consideration for schools alongside other preventative approaches.
4.4.3 Monitoring of students
Linked to the physical management of space, schools described a range of ways in which they kept track of students’ whereabouts to ensure their safety and wellbeing. In mainstream schools, this involved staff being aware of where children were during their free time, especially when there were known relationships between students. In the special school context, however, there was a much greater emphasis on continuous supervision. In several schools, children were assigned specific members of staff who would accompany them for the day. One school facilitated this using a ‘wristband scheme’ which easily identified which child each member of staff was responsible for each day. If the assigned member of staff had to leave the room for any reason, the wristband would be given to somebody else to supervise the child.

Schools also described a process of monitoring and logging student behaviour issues as part of their preventative work. This fed into identifying child sexual abuse and so is discussed further in Chapter 5.

As with managing devices and internet access, some school staff again acknowledged the need to balance monitoring with allowing children privacy and supporting the development of their independence within and beyond the school setting.

4.5 Relationships
Facilitating and supporting positive relationships was seen as key to creating a culture that helped prevent child sexual abuse and support early and active identification of issues (see Chapter 5). Promoting open and trusting relationships was important across and within the staff group; between children and staff; in children’s relationships with each other and in the schools’ relationship with parents.

4.5.1 Relationship between senior leadership and school staff
Staff needed to have confidence in the policies and processes they should follow in relation to preventing child sexual abuse. Being clear that any safeguarding concerns should be raised through the appropriate channels and reassured that they would be dealt with appropriately made people feel at ease. Designated safeguarding leads and school staff across roles emphasised the importance of knowing that any concern raised would be heard and addressed.

“Everybody knows everything, and [that it is] being taken seriously. Doesn’t matter if it’s just a niggle and you’ve got no evidence, but something doesn’t sit right – it doesn’t matter, you are listened to and it’s treated as a potential [issue].”

Staff, special school

4.5.2 Relationships between schools and local authorities
Local authorities discussed variation in the quality of relationships with different schools in their areas. Where these were felt to work well, residential schools participated fully in local networks and were ‘outward-focused’ in their approach to working with local authorities. From the schools’ perspective, staff talked about relationships working particularly well when there had been opportunities to build individual relationships either through meetings or regular contact.
4.5.3 Relationships between staff and children

Establishing and maintaining relationships between staff and children that were built on trust and transparency was described across the staff, child and parent groups as fundamental to schools’ work. It meant that children were more receptive to messages communicated by staff and had confidence to seek advice or support when needed. Children also spoke about the importance of effective relationships with staff in terms of supporting disclosure of abuse (explored further in Chapter 5).

“There’s that link between you and the house parent [...] they do care [...] they are someone there that you could go to.”

Child, mainstream school

The personal qualities of staff, including how approachable they were perceived to be, were also considered important in preventing child sexual abuse within a residential context, where parents and other adult role models were less present. In both mainstream and special schools, staff had a strong presence and talked about knowing children well, which helped foster an environment in which children knew there was somebody they could go to if they needed support. In some schools, visibility across staffing levels was prioritised. For example, senior management team members taking break and after-school club duties to engage directly with children. Relationship-building with students was a particular focus in special schools as it was perceived to take time for children to develop trusted relationships.

4.5.4 Children’s relationships with each other

In both mainstream and special schools, there was an emphasis on supporting children to behave appropriately and develop healthy relationships to help prevent child sexual abuse, particularly peer-on-peer abuse. The importance schools placed on values such as respect and tolerance played a key role in helping children to understand boundaries and behaviours that might be deemed unacceptable. This could include, for example, children learning to be respectful of each other’s belongings and not entering private spaces (such as bedrooms) without asking.

Romantic relationships between children were viewed differently between schools, with some taking a stricter approach than others in terms of behaviours that were tolerated. In some special schools, romantic relationships (where children were relationally intimate rather than necessarily sexually intimate) were discouraged, as staff and/or parents felt that the nature of a young person’s condition was such that they might not have the understanding or ability to manage or consent to such a relationship.

Approaches to romantic relationships in mainstream schools also varied. In one mainstream school, for example, students were not allowed to walk around the grounds holding hands, whereas in another couples spent time together in communal spaces and were well-known to staff. There was, however, consensus on prohibiting sexual relationships on school grounds, including where both children were legally old enough to consent (over the age of 16). Schools and children discussed clear boundaries in relation to engaging in sexual activities at school and felt that this was important in keeping children safe.

24 Staff and children discussed relationships between peers in qualitative interviews and focus groups; it was not always clear whether such relationships involved sexual activity.
4.5.5 Relationship between schools and parents

Schools were keen to encourage and foster close relationships with parents to ensure preventative work was as joined up and effective as possible. Parents’ trust in schools’ practice was enhanced where they felt staff were receptive and responsive to contact. There was a sense that prevention of child sexual abuse should be a shared responsibility and schools felt a duty to support this through clear and accessible information.

“I think [communication between schools and parents] it’s very important because you need to know what’s going on. At the end of the day, I’m ultimately responsible for him, he’s my son and I very much feel it’s my responsibility to keep him safe. So, it is very, very important. It’s important both ways [...] if I were to have any concerns, [it’s important] that they [the school] would be open and accept them, and I know that they are.”

Parent, special school

Key facilitators included:

- Promoting an open and communicative culture with parents, whereby information relating to safeguarding, wellbeing and health would be communicated clearly in advance of any education work with students. Schools and parents also spoke about more informal lines of communication – for example, ad hoc telephone calls and emails to parents when issues were raised. The relationships parents had with particular staff, including, for example, house parents and form tutors were also perceived to be important in ensuring any necessary information about safeguarding issues was properly and sensitively relayed.

- Workshops and talks aimed at addressing important issues, including in relation to child sexual abuse. For example, a number of schools had held talks on social media use and online safety to encourage engagement among parents, with the aim of agreeing a shared approach to tackling problematic behaviours both at school and at home. However, uptake of and engagement with such approaches were mixed, as described below.

Though some parents appreciated the efforts made by schools to engage them in such issues, there was evidence to suggest that others took a more ‘hands-off’ approach. Staff reported that some parents were ‘disengaged’ and felt that low levels of parental involvement limited the extent to which schools could coordinate prevention work across home and school. Two key perspectives emerged from parent participants on this point. Parents who acknowledged engaging to a limited degree described trusting the school to educate children about child sexual abuse. Others felt that it was more important for schools to take the lead in education on such matters. This was because, in their view, children were likely to be influenced by and engage with risky behaviours such as ‘sexting’ around peers and other children, making residential school a place where adults felt that child sexual abuse could be more likely to take place.

“I would imagine, you know, [children would say] ‘Oh, I sent that picture because I thought it was acceptable because that’s what everybody else does’. I think there is the new norm [...] That’s probably the hard thing for the school [...] trying to educate them of why it’s not acceptable.”

Parent, mainstream school
In contrast, other parents felt strongly that they should take the lead in education and awareness-raising on issues related to child sexual abuse and that the school’s role should be to reinforce messaging. These parents emphasised the importance of early education within the home around broader issues of values and safety which they felt fed into children’s subsequent understanding and behaviour. They also spoke about things they felt they could do better than some schools, such as discussing more sensitive issues including rape (which they thought may not have been spoken about as freely in school), and to monitor their children’s behaviour. For example, one parent described checking her daughter’s social media accounts for any signs of abuse or risky behaviour.

“When she was younger I always used to just wait until she was asleep and then scan through just to make sure there was nothing particularly worrying in any of the messages, or at least I recognised the names of people that she was friends with on social media. As a school that’s not something that they can do very easily, so again the responsibility is kind of on the parents to make sure that the children are okay.”

Parent, mainstream school

Regardless of where parents thought the main responsibility for prevention rested, they acknowledged the importance of communication between parents and schools to ensure that any emerging issues were known to both and could be dealt with quickly and effectively. In this sense preventative efforts were believed to be a joint endeavour.

“I know we send our kids off and I suppose it depends on the type of parent you are, but [...] there was very much a feeling from [the school] that it was a two-way deal, ‘We’ll look after your children, but actually, we need help from you as parents as well.’ [...] I don’t want to know all the tiny details, but I do want to know when there’s something that’s not right, some unhappiness or major stuff happening. I think we should know and I think we deserve to know.”

Parent, mainstream school

4.6 School culture

An important part of a prevention culture is the recognition that the approaches discussed do not provide a failsafe to prevent child sexual abuse. Head teachers and designated safeguarding leads described the importance of all staff recognising that ‘it could happen here’, which helped create a sense of vigilance around safeguarding. This awareness was reflected by staff at all levels. Local authority staff also aimed to convey this message in their work with schools. Through training and education, schools also sought to convey (and reinforce) the messages that a) safeguarding children was a primary priority and that b) it was the responsibility of all adults within a school community.

Creating and maintaining a respectful culture was described by school staff across roles. Staff were clear that they needed to manage day-to-day interactions within the school (between staff, between staff and children as well as between the children themselves). This meant challenging use of inappropriate or discriminatory language or highlighting conversations about inappropriate topics. Senior staff said they would ‘take staff aside’ if they said anything inappropriate, and would expect colleagues to make them aware if they had done something wrong themselves. In one special school this was described and named by senior staff as a culture of ‘safer challenge’ applying to staff across all positions.
“It’s a very cultural thing to residential special schools particularly, I think […] If I come in to [name of staff member] [saying] “Guess who I banged this weekend?”, [name of staff member] would be […] challenging me. And actually we try to empower our staff right from when they first come in: your main job is to keep these young people safe. The only way you’re going to do that is to get some rhino skin and know that somebody will challenge you if you do something wrong.”

Staff, special school

Some staff acknowledged that challenging the use of intolerant or discriminatory language among children could be difficult, primarily because of the residential context – children spend a lot of time together socially and staff are not present for every conversation. Some also felt that increasingly sexualised language could be culturally normal among teenagers in their schools.

“I think increasingly […] they normalise sexual language. So a couple of weeks ago, I told a boy off […] because another boy had knocked him to the floor and his response to that was, ‘Stop raping me’! I was appalled – firstly that he’d said it – but then trying to speak to him, he couldn’t understand what was so bad about what he’d said. It showed that he clearly had no idea what that word actually really means in terms of what it involves and the magnitude and the impact it has.”

Staff, mainstream school
CHAPTER 5: Identification of child sexual abuse
This chapter explores the types of safeguarding issues with a sexual element that schools identified, including variation in the nature and frequency of what was identified. It then examines the ways in which identification took place, led by both staff and children.

Summary

- In the proforma, the number of concerns with a sexual element recorded in the last completed academic year ranged from zero to 21, with a mean of 5.8. No clear relationship between the numbers of recorded concerns and school type was evident. Overall, however, special schools recorded nearly ten times the number of concerns per student than mainstream schools, suggesting a difference in volumes of incidents (with the assumption that children with SEND are at greater risk of specific forms of abuse) or approaches to identification and reporting.

- Online and peer-on-peer issues were the most commonly recorded concerns in the proforma in both mainstream and special schools.

- Victims and survivors formed the largest group reporting concerns, with similar proportions in mainstream and special schools. The proforma data showed that, across both mainstream and special schools, girls were more likely to have raised concerns than boys.

- Good practice centred on staff being actively aware and sensitive to signs of safeguarding risks or incidents, rather than relying on children's disclosure alone. In addition, good practice included not just appropriate responses to disclosures, but also ensuring systems and approaches to enable and support a child to discuss concerns and experiences.

- Staff were able to identify a range of direct and indirect indicators of child sexual abuse. These included emotional and behavioural changes in children, which were considered key indicators in both mainstream and special schools.

- Differences were apparent between mainstream and special schools’ approaches to proactively identifying indicators of abuse, reflecting the different levels of need and vulnerability among these schools’ students.

- Staff and parents regarded building trusting relationships as the key facilitator of identifying child sexual abuse. Children also wanted a choice of accessible routes to address concerns, supporting them to move safely through the disclosure process.

- For some children with SEND, recognising and disclosing concerns or abuse was recognised as being particularly challenging.

- Both staff and children had concerns about negative consequences of identifying potential child sexual abuse, though this was more pronounced among children.
5.1 Identified incidents

5.1.1 Overview of concerns recorded by schools

Participating schools were asked to specify the number of concerns with a sexual element that they had recorded in the last completed academic year, how many of these were discussed with the local authority, and how many were referred to the local authority in the online proforma. Figure 5.1 below sets out these findings by each school (numbers on the horizontal axes refer to separate schools).

In the seven mainstream schools, a total of 40 concerns with a sexual element had been recorded in safeguarding logs over the year, and 48 in the eight residential special schools. However, these figures should be considered within the context of the schools' student populations, which differed according to school type. Across the sampled mainstream schools, the total number of students was 4,487 (1,857 girls; 2,630 boys); at special schools there were 569 students (376 boys; 193 girls).25

Figure 5.1: Number of safeguarding concerns with a sexual element recorded, discussed and referred by each residential school (n=15)

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25 As in Chapter 2, these figures are drawn from analysis of data from the GIAS government database (GOV.UK, 2019).
As such, special schools had recorded nearly ten times the number of concerns per student: 0.08 incidents per pupil were logged in special schools, compared with 0.009 incidents per student in mainstream schools.

The number of concerns at each school ranged from zero to 21, with a mean of 5.8. Figure 5.1 suggests that there was no clear relationship between these totals and the school type. One mainstream and one special school reported that no concerns had been logged over the preceding academic year; and of the schools with the highest numbers of concerns logged, one was mainstream and one a special school. No clearly discernible patterns were evident across the remaining schools.

The brief descriptions schools gave of each concern provided insight into the range of issues being logged in safeguarding records. Alongside more serious reports of sexual violence and assault, some mainstream schools also recorded, for example, sexting and a range of peer-on-peer concerns. It seems unlikely that these issues were not also happening in other schools; rather, they were not being recorded in safeguarding logs, but perhaps elsewhere in behavioural logs. In addition, in special schools, some concerns with a sexual element seemed to relate to young people experiencing or exploring their bodies with no intent to harm. Examples included a child touching someone’s breast, exposing themselves, and walking in on someone in the shower and playing with the water.

At the research reflections workshop, school staff discussed possible reasons for the differences in the volume and variety of safeguarding concerns recorded in the proforma and reported in the qualitative interviews and focus groups. These reasons are discussed below.

1. Variation in recording processes

One reason why the proforma data might reflect lower numbers of recorded concerns was that schools recorded information in different places. This was evident in the qualitative interviews with school staff, as well as in discussions with leads at the workshop, who said that issues relating to some concerns would be logged on different systems including behavioural logs or in individual children’s daily diaries.

School leads also speculated that there might be some reticence to record concerns on safeguarding systems out of worry about the potential implications. These included the negative impact on children (particularly if they were an alleged perpetrator), and on schools in terms of additional scrutiny and oversight. This could mean that low-level concerns were recorded in locations other than formal safeguarding logs, which would be subject to such scrutiny.26

2. Variation in incidence

Schools suggested that differences in schools’ populations might influence the types of concerns that were experienced and recorded in their logs. Specific examples were that children with SEND were at greater risk of particular forms of child sexual abuse, and that experiences might also vary according to gender. The proforma data showed that, across both mainstream and special schools, girls were more likely to have raised concerns than boys.

26 Staff were hypothesising rather than reflecting on their own practice in the workshop discussion, and reiterated the point about the importance of reporting any and every concern (which was consistently made in the qualitative interviews).
3. Changes in practice over time

Schools suggested that variation between the proforma data and qualitative discussion about identification might also relate to the timing of both data collection strands, as the proforma data focused primarily on concerns recorded over the previous academic year (September 2017 to August 2018), whereas qualitative fieldwork focused on current practice at the time of interviews in 2019. Within this timeframe, schools identified a range of intersecting cultural shifts which they suggested could have influenced identification and recording practices in their settings, potentially increasing the numbers of safeguarding concerns recorded between the proforma timeframe and the qualitative fieldwork. These shifts included:

- Changes in recording processes. Several schools had moved relatively recently to electronic safeguarding logging systems, which they identified as having created a snowball effect whereby staff increasingly reported more, including lower level, concerns.
- Improvements in awareness and understanding of safeguarding issues among school staff, and changes in children’s attitudes and behaviour, both credited in part to ‘the #MeToo effect’.
- More awareness-raising and education was taking place in primary schools, with secondary schools now ‘mopping up’ and ensuring messages were embedded rather than introducing topics for the first time.

5.1.2 Types of concerns recorded by schools

Data on types of concern were also collected, as shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Nature of concern by school type
Before interpreting these research findings, it is important to highlight that there was some variation in how respondents answered the proforma questions, which is likely to have skewed the data to some degree. This variation in responses may reflect differences in how schools across the sample consider and categorise safeguarding concerns when recording them.

The proforma guidance specified that, for the questions about the types of concerns in their safeguarding logs, respondents should select all response categories that applied for each of the concerns. For example, for an incident of sexting between peers, both ‘online’ and ‘peer-on-peer’ should have been selected. However, analysis indicated that schools did not classify concerns consistently. For example, some online concerns that were also peer-on-peer were either categorised as one or the other but not both, and one school categorised all nine of the concerns they reported as inappropriate/problematic behaviour.

Figure 5.2 nonetheless illustrates that online and peer-on-peer issues were the most commonly reported concerns in both mainstream and special schools. As explored in Chapter 3, it was not always easy for school staff to make a judgement about whether incidents crossed a line from being acceptable to abusive, particularly with peer-on-peer issues or inappropriate online behaviour – these types of concerns were described as ‘grey areas’ or ‘less clear-cut’. As such, higher recording levels are perhaps as might be expected in settings where staff were encouraged to report anything that they felt unsure about, given that safeguarding teams would need to unpick whether each incident involved an abusive element.

Figure 5.3 shows the reported concerns broken down by victim and instigator gender. Both boys and girls were involved as alleged instigators, though boys more so, and both as victims and survivors of concerns that took place online or involved peers, staff, adults outside the school and home setting and inappropriate or problematic behaviour of children themselves. There was a more even balance of male and female victims for online incidents compared with peer-on-peer where there were more female victims and male instigators. (Schools were not always able to identify the gender of victims or instigators, meaning the totals shown here differ from the overview displayed in Figure 5.2.)

The proforma also explored when and where these concerns took place. In special schools, the highest number of concerns occurred on school premises, most commonly out of school hours, after school on week days and at the weekend. In mainstream settings, concerns more often occurred off school premises, with the clear majority happening outside term time. It is possible to speculate that the reasons for these differences relate to the different groups of children and young people in mainstream and special residential schools. For example, the brief descriptions in the proforma referred to several occasions in mainstream schools where incidents had occurred at parties or social events at weekends or in the holidays. However, it was beyond the scope of this research to explore these issues in depth.

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27 The term ‘instigator’ refers to the individual who initiated and carried out the activity recorded as a concern in the school’s safeguarding log. This could be an adult perpetrator, or another child or young person (for example, a young person initiating an inappropriate sexual relationship with a peer). This term was used in the proforma to enable schools to provide data about all concerns with a sexual element, regardless of whether or not they were clearly considered child sexual abuse, and to give details about the different individuals involved in a concern. It should, however, be noted that there were some peer-on-peer concerns recorded where there was not a clear instigator.
5.2 How concerns are identified

Figure 5.4 shows the ways in which the concerns with a sexual element reported in the proforma were identified within each school type. These data support the qualitative research findings, showing a broad range of people raising concerns.

The individuals affected ('victim/survivor') reported 23 of a total of 86 concerns; the proportion reported by this group was similar between mainstream and special schools. If staff groups (teachers, care/boarding staff and other staff) are combined, they also played a significant role in reporting, though less so in mainstream schools than special schools. The data also show a high proportion of concerns were disclosed by other students. This fits with the qualitative accounts of trusted relationships between staff and students across all types of schools and suggests that some children felt able to speak up in the face of a problem.

The higher number of parents reporting concerns at mainstream schools chimes with the fact that some of these concerns happened away from school. It could also be a demonstration of open lines of communication between students, parents and schools.

Breaking down the identification of concerns reported in the proforma according to the gender of victims and survivors of the reported concerns shows that girls reported concerns more often than boys in both special and mainstream schools.
Figures 5.5 and 5.6 illustrate how concerns of online and peer-on-peer abuse, the most commonly reported types of abuse, were identified. In special schools, victims/survivors and care/boarding staff identified peer-on-peer concerns and online issues equally, whereas in mainstream settings child-initiated identification of peer-on-peer issues was more common.

In the qualitative data, two forms of identification were discussed: proactive identification by school staff, and direct disclosure to staff by children about themselves or their peers.

Though the proforma highlighted high proportions of self-referral and referrals by parents, especially in mainstream settings, school staff also played an important role in identifying concerns. The qualitative data indicate that across all settings, good practice was seen as not simply relying on and supporting children to make disclosures but working to ensure concerns could and would be proactively identified by the school. To achieve this, schools needed to ensure that staff across all roles were aware of signs of something being wrong and understood the seriousness and immediacy with which concerns should be treated.
Figure 5.5: Online concerns by reporter type

Figure 5.6: Peer-on-peer concerns by reporter type
5.2.1 Proactive identification by staff

Staff across different roles in both mainstream and special schools, when considered as one group, reported a high proportion of concerns. School staff described a range of ways in which they would proactively identify safeguarding concerns with a sexual element. These fell into two broad categories: observing and investigating changes in children's emotions and/or behaviour or physical presentation; and investigating concerning information shared in overheard conversations between peers, or with staff at the school.

Emotional and behavioural changes were considered key indicators that a child might be being sexually abused in both mainstream and special schools, as shown in Table 5.1. In special schools where children had a speech, language and/or communication need, proactive observation of physical, behavioural or emotional indicators of issues was the primary identification approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioural and emotional signs of child sexual abuse</th>
<th>Physical and material signs of child sexual abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower level of engagement with staff, peers, or friends</td>
<td>Physical harm such as bruising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More negative behaviours, including poor attendance, aggression and sexualised behaviour</td>
<td>Changes in appearance, poor hygiene and self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low mood, heightened anxiety</td>
<td>Evidence of alcohol consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unexplained gifts or money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of special and mainstream schools had clearly-structured approaches to capturing baseline information about children, against which change could be assessed. Examples included individual welfare plans, which set out information about the child and established what was normal and important for them. Staff and parents also discussed sharing information about children's home life and circumstances, as well as any known triggers or behaviour traits that could indicate that something was wrong.

Similarly, some schools discussed regular and proactive assessment of risks to the wellbeing of individual children as a way of identifying emerging issues or concerns. Examples of this included regular contact with parents/guardians, ensuring strong communication to ensure any issues were identified at the earliest point. Other schools had systems in place to regularly assess children considered to be particularly at risk, for instance by RAG rating individual children and reassessing the levels of risk they were exposed to.

Routine, proactive assessment of all children in the school, with standardised record-keeping tools and processes, was particularly evident in some special school settings. Examples included:

- 'body mapping', where bruises/marks on children's bodies are recorded on a template and logged to facilitate the identification of physical harm;
- completion of daily diaries which included details of behaviour and noting any significant behavioural changes.
Staff confidence in their ability to recognise behavioural changes in children was associated with the quality and extent of their involvement with the individual student. One view was that it would be more difficult for a part-time member of staff to recognise out-of-character behaviour, and harder to observe change in a day student than one who boarded. The former point is reflected in the proforma data: Figure 5.4 showed that of school staff, it was care and boarding house staff that most commonly identified concerns at both mainstream and special schools, which may have been because of their proximity and close working relationships with children.

Identifying these signs was described by parents and staff as something that was not straightforward, particularly in relation to children with SEND. One example was that children with particular forms of autism often experienced heightened anxiety: interpreting its cause could therefore be challenging and as such, anxiety might not be a good proxy indicator of a potential concern.

“We generally see changing behaviour quite a lot and our students have a ‘spiky’ profile anyway. It can be difficult to actually sometimes distinguish between, ‘Actually, is it that high anxiety associated with autism, or is it actually something more we have to be concerned about?’”

Staff, special school

These issues were again hinted at in the proforma data, with Figure 5.4 showing that those in special schools raised double the number of concerns than in mainstream schools. This could be due to behaviours or heightened risks associated with different categories of students with SEND, such as inappropriate touching by students with a learning disability or seemingly disinhibited behaviours of some students with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Finally, it was noted that staff identification of concerns included instances where children disclosed issues of concern passively – that is, without themselves identifying the experiences as abusive or problematic. Examples included discussing drug use or details of relationships that might be inappropriate in front of certain groups of staff.

“They haven’t always got a filter. Because they’re so comfortable around us, there’s lots of things that they will talk about.”

Staff, special school

Some staff emphasised that in instances without direct disclosure or very clear physical indicators of abuse, identification of child sexual abuse could be a process of several stages, building from the point at which a concern is raised.

“[Looking into issues] will include talking with families or with a social worker [...] to find out whether there is something going on around them, and if we are satisfied that nothing has changed, or we are not worried about something different going on in the family home or a new person being around, then we just keep monitoring the situation.”

Staff, special school

28 However, the higher prevalence of online and peer-on-peer concerns at mainstream schools and the confidence of care staff that they heard everything that was going on in boarding houses might have suggested that concerns raised by care staff in mainstream schools would be higher.
5.2.2 Schools’ broader systems and cultures

Schools’ broader systems and cultures played an important role in supporting staff to identify abuse. Across all sampled schools, staff discussed having a low threshold for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns. Staff said they were encouraged to share information about anything they noticed that seemed ‘off’ or about which they were uncertain – that is, low-level concerns or doubts as well as clear-cut incidents. This kind of information was seen as important to discuss with colleagues and record, as it might be an early indicator of a problem, and/or support development of a clear picture from triangulated data. A low threshold was also felt to reduce frontline uncertainty about what should or should not be passed on and meant that emerging issues were less likely to be missed. It is, however, important to note that the proforma data suggested that schools might not consistently record all low-level concerns or ‘niggling doubts’ in safeguarding logs, as two of the schools had not recorded any concerns at all over the previous academic year. This is discussed further in section 5.1.1.

Related to this, schools had a range of mechanisms through which information pertaining to children could be collected and shared across the setting. Examples included regular discussions at team meetings and handover sessions, with some schools including wellbeing as a standing agenda item for such meetings to support regular discussion.

Staff, parent and child participants described a wide range of professionals working in and with schools who have an important role to play in identifying child sexual abuse. It was therefore important that the whole school was aware of and attentive to safeguarding (as discussed in Chapter 4), particularly as staff working in different roles were seen as having access to different information about children in the setting. For example:

- In schools where children did not need assistance with their personal care, evidence of bruising or other physical harm might be visible only to medical staff and/or those working in physical education (as well as peers in settings such as dormitories and changing rooms). This contrasts with those special schools where care staff routinely supported children with personal care and would check for marks as a matter of course.

- Some special schools worked closely with or delivered their own family support services which worked with parents, sometimes in children’s home settings. These staff would gain insight into children’s familial or home situations and could identify issues there.

Some staff mentioned close liaison with children’s social workers and family support teams as part of the process of identifying concerns. Direct work with relevant professionals could enhance the scope and accuracy of schools’ understanding of children and their circumstances, supporting identification, investigation and responses to child sexual abuse.

Communication between school and home was also key, with approaches including individual daily diaries or record books that were passed from school to home and vice versa; as well as informal conversations with parents (both regular and ad hoc). The proforma data showed that a significant proportion of safeguarding concerns were reported to schools by parents, particularly in mainstream settings (where students were more likely to spend greater periods outside the school setting). However, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, communication between staff and parents was not consistent.
5.2.3 Disclosures initiated by children

Figure 5.4 shows that more disclosures initiated by children (‘child-led disclosures’) were made at mainstream schools than special schools, where the distribution was similar between staff and child-led identification. This might relate to higher levels of staff supervision of children and the more proactive, routine identification processes special schools described. The proforma data also showed that across both mainstream and special schools, girls were more likely to have raised concerns than boys, which perhaps suggests that they were at greater risk of experiencing different forms of abuse, that they felt more able to discuss and raise issues when they arose or that disclosures by girls were taken more seriously by staff.

Two key types of child-led disclosure were discussed by all participant groups. As well as discussing how children would make direct disclosures about their own experiences, participants also discussed whether and how children would disclose information to schools about other children – either concerns about their friends’ or peers’ behaviour or that their friends or peers were at risk of abuse. Examples included sharing information about inappropriate relationships and electronic device use, including messaging and sexting, which would often be more visible among peer groups and in dormitories than by staff.

Staff, children and parents discussed a range of ways in which children might disclose and/or access support about sexual abuse, whether the concern applied directly to them or to other children in the school. Some children said they would weigh up a number of factors in determining how best to proceed, taking account of factors such as trust, privacy, accessibility or convenience, as well as the desired outcome of the disclosure.

Informal support

In some cases, both adults and children described disclosure as a staged process, in which children would progress to more formal disclosures following discussing concerns informally in hypothetical or anonymised ways, or with people other than staff or authority figures. Sometimes this was understood as a process of gathering advice and sense-checking their assessment of the situation before deciding what to do next. In other instances, it was a first step to secure moral support for the disclosure itself.

“They’ll speak to their friends first and then their friends will [...] bring the other girl to you and say, ‘She needs to speak to you about something’.”
Staff, mainstream school

Parents and children identified family members such as parents, grandparents and siblings as likely sources of support, as were close friends or peers (including older children and prefects). Talking to peers was an opportunity to seek advice while retaining control over next steps.

“I think for some people it requires so much courage to actually go and talk to one of those adults [...] it’s so much easier just to talk to a friend or a sibling.”
Child, mainstream school

Children saw two key drawbacks, however. One was that other children were less likely than adults to know how best to approach the situation; the other was the risk that peers could break the disclosing child’s confidence and perhaps spread rumours about them. However, children were clear that in reporting to staff they would be acting as a ‘good friend’. Staff also noted that children with social and
emotional difficulties tended to struggle to bond with peers, reducing the likelihood of this being a viable option for them.

Children suggested that confidential external services such as Childline provided advice and support to children without requiring formal disclosure and carried lower risk of discovery by others at school. However, some felt that these services would have limited impact, as they would not have access to contextual detail or an in-depth understanding of the child.

“They obviously don’t know the full story and they’re just going to pick bits of the information you give them. So, their advice may be partially helpful, but it can’t fully help compared to having a discussion with someone in real life.”

Child, mainstream school

Disclosure channels
Awareness of the range of staff members children could discuss concerns with appeared to be broadly consistent across child, parent and staff participants and schools. These included teaching staff (such as form tutors, subject teachers, and teaching assistants); senior leaders; residential staff (house parents and domestic staff); and pastoral care staff (such as heads of care, designated safeguarding leads, school chaplains, counsellors and therapists, medical staff such as matrons and nurses, special educational needs coordinators [SENCOs], support workers and keyworkers). Some mainstream schools also offered formal peer support from older students who had received training in safeguarding. In one school, for example, a number of older students were identified as wellbeing advocates, trained by an external provider; at another, all boarders in their first year of sixth form received internal safeguarding training so that they would know how to support any younger children that disclosed to them.

When thinking about raising a formal concern or disclosing abuse to staff, children were very clear that they would speak to the member of staff they trusted and liked most, irrespective of job role. Some participants raised concerns that this could elevate risk for children with specific kinds of SEND (such as developmental delays or neuro-developmental conditions), where settling and bonding can be a longer-term process.

Where parents had concerns about their child, they would speak first to the frontline staff working with their child or to designated leads and escalate to more senior members of staff as required.

Tools that students could use to report concerns to school teams remotely (that is, without requiring that they speak to anybody directly) were evident in both mainstream and special schools. Examples included:

- online forms for children to report concerns. One example was a bullying report form accessible via QR code, another was an online portal where children could report concerns without giving their name;
- paper forms submitted via a drop box;
- display boards where children could indicate how they felt by moving their photo to the relevant emotion (for children with SEND).

Staff in special schools also described a range of techniques such as the use of talking mats, visual aids, and photographs of recent contacts to support children, including non-verbal children, to communicate about sexual abuse.
A range of independent support services were made available to children that could support them in disclosing abuse or could help identify risk of abuse:

- Independent support available to all children across settings included helplines such as Childline, and the police (children mentioned that they could contact the police to report incidents if needed).
- Across all settings, individual children were recognised as having ongoing contact with independent services that could also act as sources of support for disclosure. Examples of this included social workers, particularly for children with SEND and looked after children; CAMHS workers; and health professionals.
- Some schools had commissioned specific services to support children, such as advocates and independent listeners.29

5.3 Supporting children to raise a concern or disclose sexual abuse

The proportion of child-led disclosures reported in the proforma was high, which indicates that at least some of the children at the participating schools felt able and comfortable to discuss concerns or disclose sexual abuse. Participants described practical approaches that they felt played a role in supporting children to disclose concerns or abuse.

5.3.1 Signposting

First, signposting children to relevant support was seen as essential. Examples included pupil handbooks, notices around schools and boarding houses, and meetings with children. Information included details of internal support channels as well as independent support services. Though many examples of signposting were provided, one view among children was that schools could do more to enhance awareness of where children could go for help as ‘a lot of people can feel lost’. There was a sense that signposting was not only directly supportive to children seeking to raise a concern, but also that visible signposting might help create an atmosphere of openness and feed into the wider prevention culture described in Chapter 4.

5.3.2 Choice

Participants felt that giving children choice, and a range of methods by which they could communicate their concerns, was an important facilitator to them feeling able to disclose abuse (examples are provided in section 5.2.3). Across schools, a varied range of options was felt to enable children to disclose according to their communication needs or preferences.

5.3.3 Accessibility

Children had access to 24/7 support from house staff, and some schools were able to offer access to the telephone whenever needed or to medical services, meaning children could discuss their worries at any time. One view was that children were likely to disclose to members of staff at times when they felt relaxed, and therefore availability of support out of school time, and awareness and understanding of safeguarding risks and response processes across all staff roles, were important.

29 Individuals, independent of school staff, leadership and governance structures, with whom children could discuss concerns or problems confidentially.
5.3.4 Appropriate environments

Finally, appropriate physical environments for private conversations were an important consideration. Having a choice of familiar, comfortable and/or off-site settings was described as supporting effective disclosure as children felt safe and able to talk more freely without fear of being overheard.

“I would say every student has got a number of familiar areas of the school, whether that be a room, an area, a settee, a place, a bench, where they are more likely to be able to talk to somebody than not. There’s plenty of areas of privacy to talk as well, and there’s a lot of space; we are very fortunate. Also, though, we’ll take students off-site if they want to go for a [...] walk and talk.”

Staff, special school

As discussed in section 4.4.2, staff described managing such encounters carefully to balance the child’s desire for privacy with minimising the risk of false allegation and of the child feeling unsafe, with good practice including visibility to colleagues out of earshot.

5.4 Barriers to children raising a concern or disclosing sexual abuse

5.4.1 Ability to identify abuse

Staff, parents and children all identified reasons why children might find it difficult to clearly identify an experience or relationship as abusive – discussed in Chapter 3. This was a fundamental barrier to children disclosing that information.

5.4.2 Communication challenges

Participants recognised a range of both disability-related and psychological barriers to talking about sexual abuse. In both mainstream and special schools, participants recognised that the ability to articulate concerns or abusive experiences would likely develop with age and/or experience. For some children with particular forms of SEND, staff recognised that making a clear disclosure might be particularly challenging, even with a range of approaches and tools schools used to support them to communicate their experiences (for example, Makaton and picture boards). Staff acknowledged that this might mean that some children would struggle to communicate the full details of their experience.

“They haven’t got the words to express either something that has happened or how they’re feeling. Quite often they’ll use quite bland words, ‘I feel happy,’ and can’t particularly explain why or what happiness feels like.”

Staff, special school

In other cases, staff were concerned that children with particular additional social and communication needs (for example, learning, communication and behavioural differences related to particular forms of autism spectrum disorder) might be less likely to come forward.
5.4.3 Emotional impacts

All participant groups identified emotional impacts – where children might feel anxiety, embarrassment or shame about the abuse – as a key barrier to disclosure. It was noted that this could lead to children ignoring or avoiding speaking about experiences they may have had. Adult participants felt that this was a particular risk for boys, who they said might be more likely to internalise and conceal concerns (about their own or other children’s experiences) than to speak to an adult. One suggestion was that boys might lack the language and confidence to talk about sensitive topics. It was also perceived to be important for staff to consider different ways of engaging children, alternative forms of communication (as previously discussed) and provide a range of appropriate contacts children could choose between according to preference and comfort.

“If you said to a group of girls, ‘Oh, you’ve got this lovely lady over here that you can go and see’, girls would probably go, ‘Oh, that’s great. I’ll maybe go and do that and have a [chat]’ – boys, it just wouldn’t work like that. So, is it better to have some anonymous chat room [...] not a face-to-face [approach]?.”

Parent, mainstream school

In addition, participants anticipated that children might feel worried about what might happen after the disclosure. For example, where peer-on-peer abuse happened within the school, the residential nature of the setting was described as something that could exacerbate the emotional impact on a victim because the perpetrator would be present (although children did not raise this specifically). One view was that disclosure of peer-on-peer abuse could lead to further abuse and organised bullying.

“If they do happen to realise that it’s an issue, they don’t believe that reporting it or saying anything will be a good thing. They believe that their peer group will make life even harder for them and they believe that they probably won’t be believed.”

Parent, mainstream school

Parents and children described a range of concerns about how the person hearing the disclosure would react. These included that children might not be believed, might not receive support to resolve the problem, might face disciplinary consequences for their involvement, and that the information could negatively affect how they were viewed by the person they told. This final point was felt to be a particular issue for some children with SEND, who found settling in and connecting with others particularly challenging and who might therefore be concerned about anything they perceived could jeopardise a valued relationship. However, concern that their ongoing relationship with a member of staff could be negatively affected was also evident in mainstream children’s interviews. For this reason, one view was that where children believed that the abuse somehow related to their own activities, such as sexting or online behaviour, it could be easier to disclose to independent external channels.

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Trauma-informed approaches and responses were not discussed in detail by participants, though it is likely that further research in this area could improve and increase understanding of how children experience and respond to threat and trauma in a residential school context.
“It could be embarrassing if you’ve done something stupid or something that you obviously shouldn’t have done, or you’ve sent something embarrassing […] You might not want people to see it or do something. [But] for example [the school’s Independent Listener], I don’t really know him, so if I told him it would be fine.”
Child, mainstream school

Related to this, participants suggested that children would be concerned about privacy and losing control of their disclosure if information had to be shared or was leaked to others. Children, parents and staff discussed concern about gossip and rumours spreading about the child as a barrier to their willingness to disclose, and children said that uncertainty about what would happen could also be a concern.

“In a boarding school everyone knows everything, and I […] do think it puts people off possibly seeking that help […] they don’t want to be branded as a whistle-blower […] or seen by other people going to chat to somebody.”
Parent, mainstream school

Information being shared with some adults in the school setting or in the family was also a concern. In mainstream settings, the possibility that schools would have to share the information with children’s families was perceived by some to be a barrier to disclosure. Some staff made assumptions that this could be the case for children of particular backgrounds, including certain Asian and West African cultures, where they suggested that shame around issues relating to sex might be more common.

“I would hazard a guess that the Asian community would be far more [likely to] keep it […] behind closed doors, just from experience of their culture and that kind of pride and honour.”

“Similarly, those boys […] in boarding from West Africa, their families tend to be very closed […] The boys tend to not tell us things which you would hope that they would.”
Staff, mainstream school
CHAPTER 6: Response, support and aftercare
This chapter explores where key responsibilities lie, challenges faced in responding to child sexual abuse, and participants’ views on best practice. The research findings reported in the chapter are mainly drawn from data collected with school and local authority staff.

Summary

- Staff were clear on the steps that should be taken if a concern was raised and talked about safeguarding being a ‘24/7 responsibility’ for everybody at the school. There was confidence in the designated safeguarding leads to then take the necessary steps to manage and resolve incidents appropriately.

- The seriousness of the concern was an important factor in deciding how to progress, including whether the issue should be referred onwards to an external agency.

- Staff talked about the challenge of making a judgement as to when incidents crossed a line from being acceptable to abusive, for example, in relation to peer-on-peer concerns.

- Differences in thresholds for concerns that local authorities accepted for referral across English local authorities were widely reported by safeguarding staff at schools. In relation to children and young people with SEND, staff felt that the specific circumstances and needs of their students was not sufficiently understood by professionals in the wider multidisciplinary team.

- Schools used a range of measures to ensure the immediate safety of children when issues arose. Longer-term support was also on offer and could be provided through a range of trained professionals including therapists and school nurses.

- A range of remedial actions were reported that aimed to bolster safeguarding practice. Key among these were awareness-raising activities with students, which typically took the form of revisiting topics that had already been addressed, such as e-safety or healthy relationships, and reiterating messages about what is and is not appropriate.

6.1 What happens when a concern about child sexual abuse is raised?

As discussed earlier, concerns about child sexual abuse were raised by a range of people.

6.1.1 Referral to designated safeguarding lead

Wherever the concern originated from, staff in residential schools were clear on the steps to be taken and confident that staff in school would know what to do.

“We all know who to go to. As soon as something happens, no one hesitates; they automatically know what needs to happen. Everybody I feel is always on constant look [out].”

Staff, special school
This clarity reflects the emphasis placed on awareness and understanding of safeguarding procedures and was clearly set out in all of the participating schools' safeguarding policies, which staff were typically required to read as part of the induction process. Even if not all the detail was absorbed immediately, the importance of informing the designated safeguarding lead if there were any concerns about safeguarding in relation to child sexual abuse was an unequivocal and overarching message. It is worth noting, however, that as indicated in Chapter 5, proforma data indicated that less ‘clear-cut’ issues might not be reported as consistently. Figure 6.1 summarises the steps, which require the member of staff to ascertain the facts and refer on to the designated safeguarding lead, in line with safeguarding policies.

If there was cause to believe that students had inappropriate sexual content on a device, staff knew not to look at the images themselves but to confiscate the device and report to the designated safeguarding lead. This was also reflected in the proforma.

When probed on whether there was any difference in response depending on children's characteristics (including, for example, their gender and any particular forms of SEND), staff strongly expressed the view that all children, regardless of who they are, need to be safeguarded against a possible risk of child sexual abuse.

Reporting these concerns to the safeguarding lead or member of the safeguarding team was seen as a priority, to be actioned as soon as possible or at least within one working day. Staff talked about safeguarding being a '24/7 responsibility', so that regardless of the time of day an incident arose or whether it was during a weekend or holiday, it would be addressed by the school.31 Although not explicit in the data, it appeared to be standard practice that the designated safeguarding lead or a

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31 See section 6.2.4 for details on reduced weekend cover at local authorities.
member of the team would be available via mobile phone at any time. One example involved a student who had been raped and phoned her house mistress during the school holidays and disclosed to her. The house mistress immediately contacted the designated safeguarding lead and they were then involved with dealing with the incident during the holiday period.

Once staff made a referral to the safeguarding team, the responsibility then lay with that team to take next steps as appropriate. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that staff in other roles were less aware of what the process of further investigation and action entailed. There was a clear principle underlying this approach of staff being informed on a ‘need to know’ basis. This reflects the fact that safeguarding issues of a sexual nature may be highly sensitive and confidential. In order to protect the privacy of those concerned, the information would therefore only be shared by those who needed to know in order to be able to interact appropriately with the student.

The question of whether staff would feel able to report concerns about more senior colleagues was probed during fieldwork. As noted in Chapter 4, this posed challenges. However, staff spoke clearly about the fact that they had a professional duty to raise concerns regardless of role or rank. In one school it was part of their contractual obligations to report any concerns; failure to do so could result in disciplinary proceedings. However, it should be acknowledged that a focus group with colleagues is unlikely to be a forum in which staff would admit to poor practice in this regard.

The importance of speaking out was reflected in safeguarding policies. If any member of staff felt that the issue was not being appropriately addressed or actively covered up, then there was a duty to whistleblow, which was also set out in school policies, most of which included details of the NSPCC or another whistleblowing helpline.

6.1.2 Decision-making process by the safeguarding team

Figure 6.2 sets out the responses from the proforma relating to the way in which schools responded to concerns of a sexual nature. This shows the high levels of school activity in logging and dealing with concerns but also the significant involvement of both parents and external agencies.

Deciding what should happen about a child sexual abuse safeguarding concern is a key part of the designated safeguarding lead role. Good record-keeping played an important part in supporting the decision-making process in schools, by providing the safeguarding team with information that might shed light on a safeguarding issue.

“We record everything on the chronology, so we can look back and say, ‘Oh, this is not the first time this has happened’, because you can’t remember every case.”

Staff, special school

In some mainstream and special schools, this decision was made collectively, with other members of the team, typically deputy designated safeguarding leads.

“I always think two heads are better than one, and we discuss about where we think it needs to go, the level of risk, level of cause for concern, and then we make the decision on that.”

Staff, special school
The immediate question for the safeguarding lead(s) was whether a concern should be referred to an external agency or not. The nature of the concern and whether it was a ‘clear-cut’ incident of child sexual abuse or not was a key consideration.

**Clear-cut or contested issues?**

As discussed in Chapter 3, some concerns were viewed as incontrovertible instances of child sexual abuse, such as a member of staff inappropriately touching a child. Only two such concerns were recorded in the proforma; both were referred to the local authority and the police.

It was not always easy for safeguarding staff to make a judgement about whether incidents crossed a line from being acceptable to abusive, particularly with peer-on-peer issues or inappropriate use of images on social media. Staff talked about the challenge of establishing and making a judgement in these circumstances.

“*Young people are going to experiment. That’s how you learn in any context, and unfortunately, sometimes that experiment doesn’t go quite the way you think it should, and it’s our job as well to identify what was an experiment and what was abuse. I think that’s a really difficult thing to do.*”

Staff, mainstream school
Differences in power dynamics were important considerations in the decision-making process, including for example age gaps or differences in ability (especially where a child had SEND) between students, or peer group pressures. This was also emphasised in local authority interviews, as detailed in section 6.2. Depending on the circumstances, the safeguarding team might speak to the children or young people themselves before making a decision about next steps. School safeguarding staff talked about using guidelines to inform this decision-making process, such as *Sexting in schools and colleges: responding to incidents and safeguarding young people* from the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) (2017) and the Brook traffic light tool (Brook, 2017).

What this meant in practice was that although staff and many students knew that sharing youth-produced sexual images was illegal, this did not mean that all incidents were referred to the police. Proforma data highlighted that some of the concerns involved students, typically in their early adolescence, sharing sexually suggestive images. Depending on the circumstances, using discretion and not always seeking to criminalise these so-called 'low-level' incidents were deemed to be proportionate responses aligned to best practice guidelines.

### 6.1.3 Concerns raised by parents

An area that could be difficult for mainstream schools to navigate was when parents reported peer-on-peer concerns. Although some were happy for schools to deal with the issue, staff reported that others demanded action to be taken before schools had been able to investigate. In one school, staff talked about groups of parents communicating inappropriately with each other on WhatsApp about particular children at the school. Staff acknowledged their lack of agency over influencing this type of communication among parents but did what they could through awareness-raising.

However, from the parents’ perspective, one participant explained that they and their child were not initially believed by school staff about an incident of sexual bullying. When their account was corroborated by two student witnesses, the staff were described as being ‘visibly shocked’, having genuinely not believed that such behaviour could have taken place.

### 6.1.4 The voice of the child

Three incidents described in the proforma involved allegations of rape disclosed by girls aged 15 and 16 in mainstream schools. It is important to note that limited information about these concerns was provided in the proforma responses; however, what was stated suggested that the response was guided by the child’s wishes. This included discussing whether they wanted to involve the police or not and, in some instances, whether or not they wished to inform their parents. The broad principles in government guidelines are that police and parents should be informed. However, the non-statutory guidance, *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges* (Department for Education, 2018a) sets out that when a young person (over the age of 13) asks the school or college not to tell anyone about an incident, schools have to make a decision on a case-by-case basis about the appropriate way to respond, weighing up what is in the best interest of the child against their duty to protect the child and others.

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32 Brook is a sexual health and wellbeing charity.
If incidents involved students at the same school, staff experience was that the victim and survivor did not want action to be taken because that would identify them.

“Most victims where the perpetrator has been within the school, have said, ‘I don’t want the perpetrator to know, [...] I want to share what’s happened to me because I would like support, but I don’t want people to know this’ [...] You can’t address it with one because it’d be perfectly obvious to them immediately where this has come from and who this has come from.”

Staff, mainstream school

This staff participant went on to say that in one case the school made a referral to children’s social care, but they also said that unless the student was willing to make a formal complaint, there was nothing they could do. In these situations, staff talked about keeping a close eye on the alleged instigator and being alert to any signs of inappropriate behaviour in future.

6.1.5 Advice from external agencies

If in doubt, designated safeguarding leads would consult with local authorities or the police. Both staff and local authority participants emphasised the importance of being able to have these discussions. Local authority advisory lines were typically manned by senior, experienced professionals and discussions were often on a ‘no-names’ basis. However, one local authority participant said that such a discussion could potentially prejudice a subsequent investigation and therefore should not happen.

In addition, a range of specialist organisations were also reported by safeguarding teams as a source of information to inform decision making. These included Brook, the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP), and the NSPCC.

6.2 Role of external agencies in responding to concerns

In line with the statutory guidance Keeping children safe in education (Department for Education, 2019a), if the decision was made to escalate the concern, this involved a referral to the local authority (either where the child lives, where the school is located or both – see section 6.2.3) and/or to the police in the case of criminal activity. Referrals to the local authority took one of two routes: a) if there was an allegation about a member of school staff, referral would be to the local authority designated officer and b) if it was about any other child protection concern it would be to children’s social services.

6.2.1 Thresholds for local authority or police referrals

A key factor in the response process was the concerns local authorities would and would not accept for referral. Differences in thresholds across English local authorities were widely reported by safeguarding staff at schools. Both mainstream and special schools said that the concerns they were referring to local authorities often did not reach the threshold.
This theme was further explored in the workshop, where safeguarding staff from schools voiced their frustration about the variability in response across local authorities, which one participant said was “an unhelpful morass”. An example was given where the same incident was referred to two different local authorities. In one authority, the incident was treated as a child suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and therefore requiring investigation (section 47 under the Children Act 1989). In the other authority, it was treated as an early help case: the first level of support offered from local authorities when potential problems arise (as described in Chapter 2). One participant reflected that practice should be consistent given that local authorities are all working from the same statutory guidance. However, this was not felt to be the case in practice, as the following quote illustrates.

“We’ve had an ongoing battle about the threshold. We report [and] they say, ‘Oh, we don’t want to know about that.’ Then you have an inspector who says, ‘You need to report it.’ That discrepancy is just painful […] They may also differ between local authority and they disagree with what the inspector says. […] and obviously these are low-level things that we do feel are important for our young people to get sorted. So we do report it.”

Staff, special school

In contrast to England, where each local authority is responsible for organising their service provision, Wales has a standardised approach in place. School staff at the Welsh school noted the consistency of response in their experiences of working with the Welsh local authorities compared with those in England.

The issue of thresholds also emerged as a key theme in local authority interviews. In contrast to the view of school staff, local authority participants spoke of working hard to ensure that threshold information was well disseminated and understood, referring to the published guidelines and awareness-raising that schools said they wanted. Given that schools and local authorities were a small sample from different parts of the country, this discrepancy could be the result of variation of practice at different local authorities, but it is not possible to give a definitive explanation from this data. One local authority view was that there was an unhelpful negative assumption among schools that referrals to children’s social care would not be accepted.

A key principle for threshold decision making was referred to in some local authority interviews as being about whether there was a risk of significant harm or if significant harm had occurred, reflecting the legislative principles in the Children Act 1989. In addition, a range of other criteria were also mentioned, such as age difference, power imbalance and coercion.

“We’d look at whether there’s a clear power imbalance. We’d look at whether or not they were similar age, we’d look at whether […] did one child have a learning need and another child didn’t, was there bullying involved, was there coercion involved?”

Local authority

These criteria chime with what school staff talked about as being the key considerations in relation to dealing with concerns of child sexual abuse.

There were particular concerns raised in relation to children with SEND. School staff working with this group felt that the additional risks of child sexual abuse were not sufficiently understood by external agencies and that the system of thresholds was not nuanced enough to reflect this and respond
accordingly. They felt that an appropriate response for a child without SEND might not be appropriate for a child with SEND, who might be at greater risk. Such an individualised response from external agencies was not reported by staff. In one example, a student was described as 'being very vulnerable online', sharing images of sexual content; however, the school was not able to get police to engage and were told 'to monitor and keep an eye' on the situation, which the school felt was leaving this student at risk.

School staff acknowledged that there was likely to be a difference between how they viewed concerns relating to child sexual abuse when compared to colleagues in local authorities or the police. This was seen as being due to the higher volume of child sexual abuse incidents being dealt with by local authorities and police. However, when this meant that a safeguarding issue was not being followed up when school staff felt it should have been, this was seen to be unacceptable.

“The vast majority of times they say it doesn’t meet [the] threshold […] there’s a few times you go, ‘How does that not meet threshold?’ […] I know it must be a funding thing; they can’t deal with everything; but at the same time, we feel that we’ve got enough experience to know what is and what isn’t safeguarding, but they’ve got these certain thresholds that say no.”

Staff, special school

In circumstances where this happened, school staff talked about the option of reporting up the management chain, to log their disagreement with the decision that had been made. One local authority participant described this escalation procedure that schools are encouraged to follow where there is professional disagreement. They noted that in their experience, these rarely related to child sexual abuse issues, but were more likely to be cases of neglect or emotional abuse within the home environment.

“These are more ongoing neglect, emotional abuse things where there can often be a difference in opinion based on the evidence that’s available, but if it’s a sexual abuse concern, my experience says that very rarely there would be a professional disagreement around that.”

Local authority

6.2.2 Onward referrals to external agencies

If the required threshold was met, the referral would then be reviewed by a multi-agency team, consisting of children’s social care, health and the police who would decide the appropriate response. When involved in the referral process, residential schools could also be part of the multi-agency response. However, schools were not automatically involved in this process, which was viewed as a shortcoming by this participant:

“One of the things that I still don’t understand is, when working together to safeguard children, is health, social services and police and really education should be in there as well. We spend more time with the children than the police do, certainly. More time than health do for the vast majority, and again more time than social care do.”

Staff, mainstream school
Proforma data listed what schools understood local authority action to have consisted of. Children’s social care responses included home visits, child and family assessments and early help referrals. Police referrals consisted of investigations, plus there was one report of a harassment order having been put in place. Qualitative data from local authority participants emphasised that for those children either on an EHC plan or looked after by the local authority, social workers would be an integral part of any response, being already involved in the care of the child and having responsibilities for safeguarding them.

6.2.3 Responsibility between ‘home’ and ‘school’ local authorities

Two problems could arise when a residential student’s family home was in a different local authority to where the school was located: confusion about which local authority a concern should be referred to, and similar confusion about which local authority should take the lead in case management. School staff saw this as a systemic problem in relation to residential schools. The fact that a child spent the majority of time at the school but their family home was in a different location was seen as a combination of circumstances to which local authority processes were not geared up to respond to.

In some cases, school staff reported being passed between the local authority where the school was and the local authority where a student’s home was, each claiming that it should be the other taking the lead and resulting in delays. A further issue was where incidents happened during a student’s journey to or from school, where the location was not fixed and potentially moving across different local authority areas.

One example was where a local authority at a student’s home was providing family support, but as soon as the child returned to school, the case was closed. This was despite the fact that the child would be returning to the home situation in a few weeks’ time. The staff participant believed that this was happening as a result of financial pressures and workload.

“[W]hen we’re dealing with agencies outside of ours, there seem to be cracks that [students] can fall between.”

Staff, mainstream school

6.2.4 Timing issues

Three issues were raised by schools in relation to the timing of making these referrals:

1. Speed of response

Not all referrals made by schools were responded to within the required one working day as set out in paragraph 71 of Working Together to Safeguard Children (Department for Education, 2018b). This included both social care and police. School staff expressed frustration about not being able to safeguard their students adequately in these circumstances. Participants talked about having to be persistent with their follow-up and some talked about escalating concerns when they did not get a response. In some cases, staff said that they never got a response to a safeguarding referral.
2. Lack of weekend cover
Local authorities were reported to run a skeleton service at the weekends, so if a safeguarding issue arose at this time, LADOs were not available, and staff would have to either speak to the police or a duty social worker, who would only be triaging the most serious cases.

3. Timing of investigation
There were two ways in which the length of a police investigation impacted on residential schools and students.

- **Initial response.** When serious allegations requiring police investigation were made, schools explained that they were not able to provide any information to the alleged perpetrators. If this person was a student, this invariably meant them being asked to leave school pending investigation. However, it was only when the student and their family were contacted by the police that they would be informed of the nature of the concern. School staff reported that this could take 2–3 weeks, described as being a very distressing time for families, who might not know why their child had been asked to leave.

- **Overall length.** There were also reports from schools of investigations that seemed to ‘drag on’ without a resolution, resulting in negative impacts for the young people involved. One example was cited where a boy felt that he was the one being punished, because since a police investigation started a year previously, he had not been allowed to see his mother or sister. Staff explained that this could leave young people feeling disempowered and disillusioned in ‘the system’ and erode their trust in the systems supposed to be there to protect them.

6.2.5 Multidisciplinary team working
Despite some challenges in the system as set out in the previous sections, good relationships and multidisciplinary team working were also described across school and local authority participant groups. Establishing these working relationships over time was key to their success and was seen to be particularly effective between residential schools and local authorities in the same area.

There was some evidence that where a local authority was small, this facilitated the development of good interpersonal relationships because it was easier for people to get to know each other. Staff talked, for example, about being on first name terms with the local LADO due to frequent discussions.

Engagement in networks, such as local safeguarding networks, was also helpful and emphasised by local authority participants as being a key mechanism for residential schools to be involved in the wider community. One school had an allocated police liaison officer who worked with the school and acted as the first point of contact. In another school a police community support officer operated in a similar role.

Staff from the safeguarding team at one special school had spent a day at the local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) as part of their training and reflected on how helpful it had been. They talked about increased awareness and understanding of how the referral system worked in practice and what information they needed to provide, which enabled them to assess and improve their own practice.
6.2.6 Working with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Staff commented on the lack of understanding among the professionals responsible for following up on safeguarding concerns of the specific needs of children and young people with SEND and their parents. Three specific concerns related to how investigations were conducted with these groups.

- **Alternative communication needs.** At a basic level, lack of understanding of SEND among staff working in children’s social care and the police meant that it was difficult for them to engage with these children and young people to establish the circumstances of an alleged situation. Just one concern in which a specialist SEND social worker had played a part in an investigation process was referred to. Staff at residential schools expressed the view that they had the potential to play a more prominent role due to their expertise in communicating, understanding and working with these children and young people.

- **Evidence threshold with non-verbal children.** The impact that a difference in mode of communication could have on proceedings could be profound. In one example, a non-verbal child was described as having communicated clearly and consistently with staff that she had been sexually abused through the use of visual boards. However, the police investigation concluded that the strength of this evidence, being non-verbal, was insufficient to proceed to prosecution. This left the school having to deal with a child who had told their trusted adults about having been sexually abused but whose case was not formally addressed.

- **Vulnerable parents.** The final concern raised was when parents themselves had a learning disability or other condition which might impact on their ability to understand or engage with safeguarding risks their child is exposed to.

  “We sometimes find some of our parents are vulnerable themselves – not just in terms of their learning difficulties, but in terms of maybe their life experience – which means that something that we might perceive as quite a serious thing, they maybe wouldn’t perceive in the right way.”

  Staff, special school

6.2.7 Overseas students

A sizeable number of overseas students attended the mainstream independent schools. For example, in one school 30 percent of students were from overseas. If safeguarding concerns about this group of students related to incidents that happened in their home country, it could be difficult for schools to address these concerns adequately. Not only was the process reported to be challenging in making contact with the relevant embassy, but the jurisdictions in question did not always have the systems in place to address the concerns raised. This potentially left students returning to situations that were unsafe and was seen as an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

6.3 Responses within residential schools

Regardless of whether other agencies were involved or not, schools were at the frontline of managing both the immediate and longer-term situation at school as well as implementing any appropriate responses and action points. Local authority staff were also involved in supporting students and schools.
6.3.1 Immediate steps

At the initial point when a safeguarding concern was raised, the safety and wellbeing of the young person(s) was reported by school staff to be the first consideration. This could involve taking immediate action where necessary, such as a staff member or student being asked to leave the school pending investigation and/or ensuring a student remained in a safe physical space. In some schools, staff explained that children had been provided with a short-term boarding place if the presenting risk was at home.

If the incident involved youth-produced sexual imagery, school staff talked about confiscating and/or wiping devices in accordance with advice from the UKCCIS. Proforma data detailed incidents where this had happened. In one example, a student was supported to make a report to CEOP.

Where safeguarding incidents involved students from other schools, liaison with safeguarding teams at other schools might form part of the initial response. As highlighted in Figure 5.4 (Chapter 5), there were several incidents in the proforma where concerns had been reported by designated safeguarding leads or teaching staff from other schools. The information provided indicated that cooperative working between school staff was part of the response. One example was where a designated safeguarding lead at another school reported that a nude image of a student from the school participating in the research was being circulated among pupils in their school. The actions listed in the proforma consisted of a discussion about management of the incident between the safeguarding leads at both schools; discussion with the student and his parents about the incident, as well as identifying what support could be provided.

Schools talked about keeping parents informed, unless there was a compelling reason not to. The proforma data indicated that on a number of occasions, schools supported students to inform their parents about incidents. However, this did not always seem to have happened, indicating that the schools' commitment to open communication with parents might not always translate into practice.

One example was a concern reported by a parent where a young person with autism who was resident full time at a special school had been interviewed by the police without her parents' knowledge or presence. This was in response to an allegation about a member of staff's inappropriate behaviour towards this student that had been raised by the parent. This parent emphasised the importance of being kept informed about what was happening in relation to the investigation, saying that she had chased the school to get an update about what was happening but to date had not been made aware. For those children with a social worker, typically those on an EHC plan or child protection plan, the expectation from school and local authority staff was that their social worker would be kept informed of all incidents, regardless of whether or not they were escalated.

Feedback to the person who raised the concern with the safeguarding team was also identified as being important. School staff understood that information going forward in an investigation was on a 'need to know' basis. However, if they did not hear anything back after having raised a concern it could leave them worried that the issue was not being dealt with, so being told that the matter was in hand was appreciated and seen as good practice. For example, some special school staff said that being aware of an ongoing incident meant that they could avoid triggering a negative reaction in a student.

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33 The student's age at the time of this incident was not obtained.
6.3.2 Follow-up actions

Once the schools were confident that the immediate risks had been addressed, next steps were considered, which could be support and/or specific actions. In these circumstances, staff reported carrying out or revisiting a risk assessment in order to systematically review a concern. Local authority participants also talked about working with schools subsequent to a child sexual abuse concern having been raised to provide their expertise on any lessons learned.

One mechanism for managing an ongoing situation in school was to keep students apart. Participants acknowledged the challenges of managing this in practice. Making changes such as moving a student from one boarding house or class to another offered some scope for achieving this. However, maintaining separation during free time, sports and in boarding houses at smaller schools where students were of the same age was reported as challenging. In special schools, which had a higher staff to student ratio (often one-to-one), it was described as being easier, because staff had a high degree of control over students’ whereabouts.

Support for children and young people

Providing support was the next step in the process. For young people, this could either be internal to the school (in the form of pastoral support, school counsellors, specialist therapists, school nurses); or external (for example, from CAMHS, sexual health clinics or specialist support organisations).

There was evidence both from the qualitative interviews and the proforma data that support might be offered and not taken up at the time, particularly with counselling. It was recognised that students might not be ready to face a distressing experience immediately and so being able to access support when they were ready was considered important.

Local authority participants reflected on the fact that mainstream and special residential schools often had better support available for students than they were able to offer, particularly in relation to mental health support. However, staff at one mainstream school talked about the pressure on their counselling provision, with the demand for the service greater than supply.

In the absence of in-house support provision, local authority participants talked about signposting schools to specialist voluntary organisations. The importance of a young person having access to an independent advocate via the local authority was raised. In another local authority interview, the involvement of a youth offending team to support young people facing criminal proceedings was also highlighted.

When raised in discussion groups with children and young people themselves, they voiced their confidence in the schools to support them should difficulties arise. Ensuring the support was discrete was mentioned as being desirable. For example, in one school students explained that the welfare room was next to the games room. Anyone going to the welfare room for support was very visible, which was seen to be a barrier to seeking help. One parent said that her daughter was reluctant to take up counselling because she was worried about what her peers would think.
Support for families
Where a concern had been referred to police or local authorities, families were offered support from a LADO or a social worker (although it is not clear from the data if this always happened). This, rather than the schools, was described as being the appropriate source of support at this time. One local authority participant described an example where a child had been sexually abused by a member of school staff. The family were allocated a social worker to support them through the initial process. Subsequent to this, when there was no longer a need for social worker input, the LADO took the role of being the liaison with the family and supported them when the case went to court. Other local authority participants described providing parents with information about available support from other charitable or voluntary organisations.

Early help was one option available (see Chapter 2) for putting supportive measures in place at a family level. While not necessarily focused on risk of child sexual abuse, participants referred to situations where this could be helpful for vulnerable families. However, its voluntary nature was seen to be a barrier to effectiveness, with one school staff member saying that families would not choose to invite social services into their homes (even though it does not have to be led by social services) (Department for Education, 2018b). The length of time taken for a referral to be actioned was also seen as unhelpful.

School staff were asked in the workshop whether they offered support to families when a concern was being dealt with internally. They talked about the importance of close contact and frequent communication with families as a way of providing support and reassurance.

Support for staff
The impact on school staff of child sexual abuse at their schools was highlighted by local authority staff and schools.

One school staff participant described the shock when a senior member of staff at a school he had worked at previously had been accused and found guilty of child sexual abuse. He said that his relationships with colleagues outside of the school were ‘tainted’ by association and he felt ‘abandoned’. Although this happened about 20 years ago, the participant felt sure that the reaction would be the same if it happened today.

By contrast, local authority participants talked specifically about the importance of supporting staff at schools where child sexual abuse had been perpetrated by a colleague, who may have been well-liked and trusted. One local authority participant with direct experience of this described having spent some time working from the school in question, providing opportunities for informal discussions with staff. In addition, a specialist was commissioned to conduct supervision sessions with staff.

However, safeguarding staff at the workshop reflected on a general lack of opportunity to share and debrief about the range of concerns with a sexual element they were dealing with and highlighted this as a recommendation for good practice.

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34 Whether or not this was a residential school was not clear in the interview data.
6.4 Outcomes

In this final section, actions taken by schools – following the conclusion of local authority and police investigations where relevant – are explored. These could take the form of punitive or remedial action.

6.4.1 Punitive measures

Following the conclusion of an investigation, if a staff member was found to have engaged in sexually inappropriate behaviour, they would be dismissed. The proforma data included only two concerns where a member of school staff was found to have behaved in a sexually inappropriate way. One of these involved a contracted staff member who was reported by a parent to have been sending highly sexual messages to their child. Though the incident did not reach the threshold for police action, the staff member's contract was terminated with immediate effect for breaching the staff code of conduct. (The other concern reported in the proforma was described as still under investigation.)

In mainstream schools, students could be excluded or asked to leave if their behaviour warranted it. For example, when discussing with young people a hypothetical situation in which a student couple in a relationship were found together in a bedroom, one student commented that they would definitely be asked to leave the school. This was seen as an accepted consequence according to school rules and, as such, a fair sanction.

Permanent exclusion could have a negative impact on a student's future school career, so depending on what had happened, being asked to leave was seen as a gentler option. This was cited as being a possibility in situations where there had been low-level online or peer-on-peer concerns, not 'serious' incidents such as sexual assault or violence. The highlighted concerns involved students who were also experiencing other challenges, such as fitting in with their peers at the school or with their mental health. The school the student was moving to would be informed of what had happened.

Being excluded was not discussed as a consequence in special schools. This probably reflects the fact that a core part of their work with students is to teach safe and appropriate behaviours. Some schools were looking after children who had experienced trauma and abuse themselves, which can lead to harmful sexual behaviour being displayed – the very issue these schools were seeking to address.

Local authority participants who were responsible for commissioning places for students with SEND in residential schools talked about their safeguarding responsibilities towards the young people. If they had serious concerns about safeguarding, they could remove the funding for a young person’s school place. This was not a course of action taken lightly due to the disruption for the young person but reflects how seriously risks of child sexual abuse were viewed.

6.4.2 Remedial action

Across all the participating schools that recorded safeguarding incidents in the proforma, a range of actions were reported that aimed to bolster safeguarding practice following an incident. Key among these were awareness-raising with students, which typically took the form of revisiting topics that had already been addressed and reiterating messages about what is and is not appropriate. In some instances, this communication came from the police (reflecting discussion in Chapter 4 about external speakers being considered by some to engage more effectively with students). If an incident had happened that was either of a sufficiently serious nature or affected the wider school community, parents would be informed, typically via email.
Identifying any learning points from safeguarding incidents was widely reported by staff, for example, reviewing systems, policies and processes. The importance of reflective practice was highlighted, but finding enough time was acknowledged as a barrier.

Where safeguarding incidents involving peers at the same mainstream school had been concluded, one of two courses of action were reported. The first was to keep the students apart as far as possible, which in some cases involved moving to a different boarding house, dormitory or tutor group. The second was to seek reconciliation through a process of restorative justice, whereby students would be encouraged to consider the situation from other viewpoints.

"Rehabilitation is very important and also reconciliation. If there are two students together, we will always try and bridge-build between them because they are part of the community and we wouldn't want one of them to feel that they could no longer be here because of an incident."

Staff, mainstream school

Responses needed to be more tailored at special schools to take account of the wide range of student abilities and needs.
The Inquiry commissioned this mixed methods research study to support its residential schools investigation. The aim of this project was to build a better understanding of the way in which residential schools’ policies and processes for safeguarding against child sexual abuse operate in practice.

7.1 Key research findings

This chapter synthesises data from the online proforma and qualitative fieldwork across the four substantive themes discussed throughout the report: understanding, prevention, identification and response to child sexual abuse in residential schools. Data are discussed in relation to nine key research findings, which highlight issues that are important and specific to the residential context. This section concludes by exploring potential areas for further research.

1. Within the education sector, residential schools face distinct and complex challenges to prevent and respond to incidents of child sexual abuse effectively

Safeguarding children, some of whom have very high levels of need in relation to their SEND, requires residential schools to work in a wider and more complex range of situations or contexts than is required in day schools. Schools need to ensure that safeguarding practice is in place around the clock as part of children’s care: in their residential settings, in children’s leisure time in and around the school, off-site during term time and across peer relationships when children and young people are not in the classroom.

Managing children’s interactions with each other outside of the classroom was acknowledged as a particular challenge for residential schools and one that needed to be balanced with children’s rights and needs to develop independence and peer relationships within and beyond the school setting.

Residential schools can be isolated, both because they do not tend to cluster geographically, and because they are commonly located in more rural areas. In this context, the distance some parents lived from school and the diverse range of cultures which children were from were both factors that could act as barriers to successfully engaging parents in training and education on safeguarding issues. For example, parents and schools had different views on children’s use of and access to devices, which included removing mobile phones at night. However, as part of discussions of good practice, some schools described the value they saw in ‘looking outwards’, fostering close working relationships with their local authorities, other agencies like the police, and bringing in external expertise to the school to ensure students have access to independent professionals.

Staff in residential schools spent a significant amount of time with children in their care, and it was acknowledged that they might therefore play a greater role in identifying and responding to incidents than staff in non-residential settings. The importance of tailored and comprehensive training was viewed as vital in this context: it was acknowledged, for example, that training should address the potential for lines of professional boundaries to become blurred, which could arise due to the ‘in loco parentis’ role played by staff in residential settings.
While partnership working across schools was reported and to some extent facilitated by local authorities (for example, through access to local safeguarding networks), there was a sense that more could be done to share learning and experiences across residential schools. At the study's workshop, staff involved in safeguarding work spoke about the value in being brought together as a group of residential schools to reflect on and share practices with leads from similar settings to theirs. They noted practical things they would take back to their schools from others' practices (such as a 10-minute safeguarding video shown to all contractors or a system of coloured lanyards for visitors to the school to demarcate the level of access to children those visitors were cleared to have).

2. All participants could identify ‘clear cut’ types of child sexual abuse such as sexual violence and rape but were less confident about identifying and dealing with peer-on-peer concerns and other ‘grey areas’

School and local authority staff had a clear theoretical understanding of the definition of child sexual abuse and the wide range and different types of abuse covered by the term. However, when moving from a conceptual definition of child sexual abuse to operationalising these definitions in practice, the reality was more nuanced.

Incidents that involved sexual violence, assault or rape, or where an adult was involved, were seen as clear-cut instances of child sexual abuse. They were discussed within schools and (almost always) referred to local authorities and the police.35

In other situations, such as incidents between children, a range of factors affected how a safeguarding incident would be viewed and addressed. These kinds of incidents were often peer-on-peer concerns and described as ‘grey areas’ in practice. Youth-produced sexual imagery is an example of this. Sharing sexual images and videos of children and young people under 18 is illegal. In reality, however, not all concerns were treated by schools as child sexual abuse, and guidance makes clear the importance of practitioners using their informed professional judgement (UKCCIS, 2017). High proportions of online and peer-on-peer concerns were reported in the proforma, which suggests that while there may be a lack of clarity on dealing with the issue, concerns of this nature were being recorded in some schools.

In practice, these ‘grey areas’ required an assessment of the nature of the relationship between the people involved, any cognitive impairment and other contextual factors such as likely peer pressure. Staff pointed out that the normative sexual development of teenagers will involve experimental sexual encounters and interactions. For children whose SEND affected their ability to understand what would and would not be appropriate, managing their sexual development was an area requiring great sensitivity.

35 As noted in Chapter 6, there were incidents where 15- and 16-year-old students did not want experiences of rape to be referred onwards and so did not happen as a result.
As highlighted in Figure 7.1, deciding whether an incident involving peers was child sexual abuse therefore required a nuanced assessment of the dynamics and relationships between those involved. For example, a sexual encounter between two 15-year-olds in a romantic relationship, both of whom were seen as of equal power and had given their consent, was not something staff were comfortable to define as child sexual abuse. However, if one child was 15 years old and the other 13 years old, where there was a mismatch in power, social status or ability to understand the sexual encounter, or where one party did not feel they consented, this was more likely to be seen as harmful or abusive behaviour.

3. Prevention work was multi-faceted and included awareness-raising, and education and training of staff, students and parents. This was both supported and underpinned by a strong ‘safeguarding culture’ within schools

Good safeguarding practice required schools to develop and support a safeguarding culture. This involved ensuring that structural approaches to preventing child sexual abuse were in place (such as safer recruitment) and situational risks were managed (such as shared dormitories and bedrooms).

Of key importance was building open and trusting relationships across both the staff and student bodies, with interactions that were respectful and a zero-tolerance approach to the use of sexualised, sexist or discriminatory language. Promoting open and trusting relationships was seen to support early and active identification of issues. It also meant that children were more receptive to messages communicated by staff and had the confidence to seek advice or support when needed to ensure the active identification of issues. This was applicable to relationships across and within the staff group; between children and staff; in children's relationships with each other and in the schools' relationship with parents.

36 While 15 years old is below the legal definition of the age of consent, staff talked about sexual encounters where they felt young people had capacity to consent to sexual acts within a relationship and had done so.
Structural approaches to prevention
Schools’ governance structures had checking and balancing responsibility for safeguarding. While schools felt that these structures generally worked well, challenges could arise, for example, when a proprietor was distant from their school or where governors lacked experience in education and working with children. Alongside this, local authorities that commissioned residential education provision monitored schools through visits and contract management meetings on safeguarding practice to ensure provision was of a high quality. Some also discussed carrying out broader auditing processes of all schools in their area which focused on reviewing school policies and processes.

Designated safeguarding leads led safeguarding work within schools, checking policies were up to date, overseeing safer recruitment practices, ensuring staff in all the diverse roles within a residential school were adequately trained, having oversight of any incidents or concerns that were logged, making decisions about the response required and coordinating with other external agencies involved to respond appropriately when required. Designated safeguarding leads described the importance of instilling a sense of vigilance across the staff body, never becoming complacent in their practices, and remaining mindful that child sexual abuse ‘can happen here’.

Designated safeguarding leads felt the scope of their role had increased substantially in line with emerging understanding of the scope of child sexual abuse and raised the potential need to professionalise the role further, as well as reduce teaching duties to accommodate the workload.

Training for staff
Feedback on the quality and nature of training was mixed. For example, the core training offered by the local authority was often thought to be important for new recruits, but some felt it could be improved by further tailoring and using more engaging techniques, including discussion of case study scenarios tailored to specific contexts.

Local authority participants also discussed the importance of tailoring training to ensure it met schools’ needs and described providing learning gathered from other schools, including from serious case reviews. Local authorities also reported that they supported schools with policy resources, training materials and access to safeguarding and education networks.

Situational approaches to prevention
Monitoring access to devices and the internet was perceived to be an important part of schools’ preventative safeguarding work (whilst recognising that children and young people also need to learn how to use the internet safely). Schools described a range of approaches to help ensure appropriate and safe use of the internet, including limiting access to devices and sites deemed inappropriate for prolonged use and physical monitoring of access (i.e. staff watching children using devices in the same room). Despite such policies and approaches, it was felt to be challenging to safeguard students effectively in this rapidly-changing area, especially where children’s computer literacy was greater than that of the school staff.
School staff also described forms of physical management of children by gender and age to keep them safe, ensure healthy boundaries between them and offer privacy when needed. In some mainstream schools, contextual safeguarding practice included checking certain areas (dormitories and showers, for example) that were identified as potentially riskier more regularly to ensure children were safe. In some special schools (where appropriate to the level of need) there was a more active management of all space which included, for example, restricting access to bedrooms and staff logging entry and exit times in communal spaces to provide a full audit of all events. Across schools, management of the physical environment was felt to be particularly challenging in the residential context due to the constant and extensive nature of the task.

4. Parents and children wanted education and awareness-raising work within the school to start as early as appropriate. However, some parents were more ‘hands-off’, trusting the school to take the lead

Across both mainstream and special schools, work that dealt specifically with relationships, sex and sexual abuse built on a foundation of more basic information about school rules and appropriate behaviour which was a focus during children’s earlier education and would be tailored to the specific needs and capabilities of children in different settings.

Preventative work could be challenging in the special school context due to the range of complex needs some children had, for example learning disabilities making it difficult for the concept of child sexual abuse to be understood. However, children and parents advocated for schools to deliver appropriate messages as early as possible, adapting approaches for students’ developmental phase. This was considered especially important in relation to online risks.

Effective education and awareness-raising included repeated messaging, informal discussions, bringing external speakers in to speak to children, and innovative, story-telling approaches. Children valued approaches which tackled child sexual abuse issues directly and transparently.

Though schools made efforts to engage parents in preventative safeguarding work, some parents admitted being more ‘hands-off’ because they trusted the school to educate children on this (and related) issues.

5. Disclosures were often initiated by children, suggesting that some children felt able and comfortable to talk about their concerns. Overall, staff reported the highest number of concerns

Disclosures initiated by children
Children said they would weigh up different factors in determining how best to proceed, taking account of trust, privacy, accessibility or convenience, as well as the desired outcome of the disclosure. Children were also concerned about losing control over the onward process and outcome after making a disclosure. Support to discuss concerns informally with staff, friends and family members before disclosing and awareness of the full range of disclosure channels were important factors in the decisions children made. They were clear that they would speak to the member of staff they trusted and liked most, irrespective of job role.
A number of practical approaches played a role in supporting children to disclose concerns. These included appropriate signposting to support, giving children choice and agency in how they discuss concerns, having accessible support available 24/7, and the provision of appropriate physical space to have private conversations. However, challenges were also reported and were perceived to be a barrier to children making disclosures. These included:

- Communication issues, which included both disability-related and psychological barriers to talking about sexual abuse. Staff recognised that making a disclosure is challenging for all children and that this could be amplified for some groups depending on their level of needs and previous experiences, even with a range of approaches and tools schools used to support them (for example, counselling or non-verbal forms of communication).

- Fear of disclosure, whereby children might feel anxiety, embarrassment or shame about the abuse, especially if abuse had happened in the school setting or amongst their peer group out of school and there were risks of repercussions.

Identification by staff and other adults

Good safeguarding practice requires proactive work by staff, rather than solely relying on children to disclose abuse. To achieve this, school staff observed changes in children’s emotions, behaviour and physical presentation. Schools discussed ways in which they monitored changes, including structured approaches to capturing baseline information and proactive risk assessment, through for example, contact with parents and guardians. The proforma showed that, across mainstream and special schools, staff reported the highest proportion of concerns recorded in schools’ safeguarding logs.

Staff in special schools were more involved in identifying signs of abuse than staff in mainstream settings. Practices in some special schools focused on enabling staff to identify abuse because of children’s more limited ability to recognise or communicate concerns or abusive experiences.

6. Reporting practice varied between residential schools in the study, despite working from the same statutory guidance

Descriptions in the proforma provided insight into the range of concerns being logged in safeguarding records and it seemed there were some disparities between schools with regards to concerns that were and were not logged. For example, all schools talked about concerns relating to sexting and peer-on-peer issues, however they were only detailed in the proforma by some. Differences in the volume of concerns could relate to failure to identify and/or record incidents by some schools; variations in recording processes, including logging concerns elsewhere (in behaviour logs, for example); variations in levels of incident across different types of school; children not feeling able to report in some schools; and changes in practice over time.

7. Residential special schools recorded nearly ten times the number of concerns per student than other residential schools

Special schools recorded nearly ten times the number of concerns per student than mainstream schools, which may suggest that special schools are identifying and reporting a higher proportion of incidents taking place. It may also be linked to the level and type of need that some children with SEND have (for example, getting undressed in inappropriate places).
8. Staff reported that they understood the guidance and knew what to do when incidents were raised. The use of discretion by safeguarding leads following up on concerns was important

Reporting and referral practice
Across all schools, staff discussed having a low threshold for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns. Staff were encouraged to share information about anything they noticed, however ‘small’ with the designated safeguarding lead – enabling them to be aware of issues, make decisions about follow-up required and allow for small pieces of information to ‘build up’ a bigger picture where relevant. It was important that the whole school was aware of and attentive to safeguarding, particularly as staff working in different roles saw children in different contexts. This ‘whole-school’ approach and low threshold for reporting was felt to reduce frontline uncertainty about what should or should not be passed on and meant that emerging issues were less likely to be missed.

Though some concerns were viewed as incontrovertible incidents of child sexual abuse, such as an adult inappropriately touching a child, others were not clear cut (peer relationships that might be considered peer-on-peer abuse, for example); these were described in the report as ‘grey areas’. Depending on the circumstances, the safeguarding team might speak to the child or children themselves or consult guidelines to inform their decision-making process.

Schools followed non-statutory guidance such as Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges (Department for Education, 2018a), and used the discretion outlined within this guidance to make decisions about whether to involve police and parents. This was to ensure a proportionate response in certain circumstances – an example highlighted in the proforma was older students sharing sexually suggestive images. In exceptional circumstances, this sometimes meant that incidents that may have been illegal were not reported to the police. For example, two incidents of rape were recorded in the proforma as not reported to the police in consideration of the victims’ wishes.

This highlights some of the challenges schools faced in weighing up what is in the best interest of the child against their duty to protect the child and others. If in doubt, designated safeguarding leads would consult with local authorities or the police. Both staff and local authority participants emphasised the importance of being able to have these discussions. A range of specialist organisations, including Brook and the NSPCC, were additional sources of information to inform decision making.

Following an incident, schools offered support to those affected, carried out education and awareness-raising with students, undertook risk assessments and worked with local authorities to share learning and expertise.

Immediate responses and longer-term support
Schools were at the frontline of managing both the immediate and longer-term situation at school as well as implementing any appropriate responses and action points. The safety and wellbeing of children and young people involved was of the highest priority and principally guided any actions schools took. This could involve a staff member or student being asked to leave the school pending investigation. Schools also aimed to keep students apart from each other where appropriate, but this was challenging in practice.
Next steps reported by schools included carrying out risk assessments and working with local authorities to share learning and expertise. Children voiced their confidence in schools to support them should difficulties arise. However, some challenges were identified, such as children not being ready to seek help or being concerned that peers would know they were accessing support.

Final actions taken by schools, following the conclusion of local authority and police investigations where relevant, included both punitive and remedial measures. Punitive measures involved dismissing staff and permanently excluding children, which was viewed as a fair sanction in more serious cases (being excluded was not discussed in special schools). However, care would be taken to ensure overly negative impacts on a child’s school career were minimised where possible. In addition to this, more remedial and broader measures were reported by schools to bolster safeguarding practice. This could include identifying learning points to feed into policies and training, as well as awareness-raising with students, which typically took the form of revisiting topics that had already been addressed and reiterating messages about what is and is not appropriate.

Families were also given support. The importance of close contact and frequent communication was perceived as a way of providing reassurance while incidents were managed.

Finally, the importance of support for staff involved in dealing with incidents of child sexual abuse was highlighted. This included support from local authorities in cases where colleagues had been found guilty of perpetrating child sexual abuse. However, some felt there could be more opportunities for staff to share and debrief on concerns with a sexual element.

9. Schools reported difficulties escalating referrals to local authorities

In line with the statutory guidance *Keeping children safe in education* (Department for Education, 2019a), if the decision was made to escalate the concern, this involved a referral to the local authority (either where the child lives, where the school is located or both).

In addition to potential issues around engagement and understanding, there were two specific challenges reported by schools when escalating referrals of incidents to local authorities. These were, firstly, the variation across different local authorities in the thresholds for accepting concerns and in the kinds of responses given and, secondly, the allocation of cases and the lead in case management when a residential student’s family home was in a different local authority to where the school was located.

The variation in responses and thresholds from local authorities was particularly challenging; where a local authority felt an incident fell below their threshold, but schools felt it was a safeguarding issue, it fell to schools to respond or look to other agencies to safeguard a child they felt was still at risk. This was particularly highlighted as problematic in some special schools where it was felt that the specific needs of children and/or parents with SEND were not always fully understood or appropriately considered. In contrast, local authority participants reported working hard to ensure that threshold information was well disseminated and understood, referring to the published guidelines and awareness-raising that schools said they wanted.

Dealing with the issue of a home and school local authority was a systemic problem particular to the context of residential schools. Schools felt that the differential in local authority responses, the lack of clarity over which should respond, and which should lead case management illustrated an element of the system not currently geared up to the residential schools context.
In addition, schools raised issues about the timing of referrals. These included the speed of response from the local authority which was sometimes beyond the required 24-hour window, skeleton weekend cover within local authorities and timing of investigations which were sometimes overly delayed and prolonged.

Despite these challenges, good relationships and multidisciplinary team working were also described across school and local authority participants. Establishing these working relationships over time was key to their success and was seen to be particularly effective between residential schools and local authorities in the same area.

### 7.2 Future research

This study is based on reported data, both quantitative and qualitative in nature. It is clear that in some cases there is tension between the practices reported by schools, and the experiences of young people and parents. This suggests the value of further research to explore safeguarding practices in residential schools that draws on observed as well as reported data. This would allow for the way in which a culture manifests and is operationalised to be examined and for the ‘contextual’ aspect of safeguarding to be explored.

Similarly, there would be value in comprehensively exploring data drawn from school safeguarding records, behaviour logs and social care records to build a clearer understanding of the way in which safeguarding concerns in residential schools are processed and responded to on a case-by-case basis. In particular, this would enable further exploration of whether and how peer-on-peer incidents are recorded.

Finally, it is clear that residential schools are eager to understand, share and implement good safeguarding practice in their settings. This suggests that building the evidence base on effective interventions, particularly those specifically targeting the residential context, should be a key component of any future research programme.
Appendix A: Methodology and sample

This appendix provides further detail on the research and methods described in Chapter 1.

Research ethics

Working to the highest standards of ethical practice is a priority for the Inquiry and all members of the research consortium. This is important with all research, including that involving children and young people and discussing topics considered particularly sensitive. As such, the Inquiry, NatCen and ResearchAbility’s ethics governance procedures are in line with the requirements of the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) and Government Social Research (GSR) research ethics frameworks, and careful consideration was given to the ethical aspects of this research as outlined below.

Key ethical considerations

The overarching issues that were considered in designing and conducting the research were:

Independence and objectivity

In order for schools and local authorities to consent to take part in the research, they needed to be persuaded of its aims and rationale – that is, that it fills an evidence gap about safeguarding practice in residential schools with a view to promoting best practice. Overcoming the risk that schools feel their reputations may be damaged by association with the Inquiry was also a consideration here. The research team are highly experienced in conducting all research activities objectively and worked to ensure materials are clear and that the data collected and analysed truly represent participants’ voices.

Ensuring inclusion in our research studies is a key foundation of how we work. For this study, this involved work to ensure participants – including children in a range of age groups and levels of cognitive ability – were supported to take part in the research on a voluntary basis, with informed consent collected from both the participant and, where applicable, their parent/guardian.

Participation based on valid consent

This implies both that participants understand what the research involves and that they are enabled to consent (or refuse to consent) to participate. We prepared and provided tailored, accessible materials and informed participants across the groups that taking part was voluntary, confidential and anonymous. All recruitment materials provided clear information tailored to participant groups, including accessible information for the younger children and those with SEND. Where students had particular communication needs, the information was provided in an appropriate mode and format following discussion with each school. It was also vital to obtain parental consent for children to participate before the research was discussed with each child.
Researchers facilitated participants to make an informed decision about taking part, ensuring before data collection began that they understood what confidentiality and anonymity meant, the importance of keeping what was shared in group discussions to themselves, and being clear about the limits of confidentiality. The ongoing nature of consent was explained, including that withdrawal was possible up until the point of data analysis.

**Participants’ wellbeing**

Careful consideration was given to protecting the welfare of research participants, which is particularly important when exploring sensitive topics or engaging people who may be in vulnerable circumstances. Throughout all stages of the research – from recruitment to participation in interviews and groups – we provided participants with clear information about the topics being covered and agreed clear ground rules for participants ahead of each focus group.

All researchers conducting interviews and focus groups were highly experienced and alert to signs of discomfort during fieldwork (verbal and non-verbal). These were acknowledged, and participants asked whether they wished to move to a new topic, take a break or bring the discussion to a close. All research staff undertaking interviews also attended the Inquiry’s mandatory safeguarding training.

Follow-up support was offered to all participants as a key element of the project’s safeguarding approach. This was clearly communicated to all participants with written signposting to relevant support organisations.

**Confidentiality, anonymity and disclosure**

A detailed and comprehensive disclosure procedure was designed and put in place to support the research team to deal with any instances where a respondent discloses serious harm or potential harm to themselves or identifiable other. This protocol was designed in close collaboration with the Inquiry’s safeguarding team and representatives of the NatCen Disclosure Board to ensure that any disclosure of past or potential harm to participants was shared and responded to appropriately.

The circumstances in which participant confidentiality may have to be breached were carefully explained to participants in their information leaflets, consent forms, and by researchers in person. No incidents of disclosure took place during fieldwork.

Rigorous data security and protection against direct or indirect disclosure of identity was built into all stages of the research, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) obligations.

**Ethical approvals**

The research was approved by two research ethics committees: the Inquiry’s Research Ethics Committee, and the NatCen Research Ethics Committee, comprised of senior staff and external experts. The strand of qualitative research involving local authority leads was also reviewed and approved by the research ethics committee of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services.

The ethics committees considered all aspects of the research design in detail, including, for example, the detailed disclosure protocol. The NatCen and Inquiry committees reviewed and approved research materials such as consent forms; the disclosure protocol; participant information sheets; the participant ‘debrief sheet’ (providing details of relevant support organisations).
Sampling and recruitment

This study used purposive sampling to achieve range and diversity across key characteristics of the study population. This was to enable comprehensive mapping of the breadth of themes and issues across the population, rather than measure prevalence (as in quantitative research). As such, it was important to include schools with less common features – meaning the sampling criteria for this research does not reflect the proportion of schools with particular characteristics in the wider school population.

Sample

Across England and Wales, 15 case study schools were sampled purposively to ensure a range of establishments working with a cross-section of children and young people were included. The sample was drawn from data downloaded and analysed from the government database Get information about schools (GOV.UK, 2019). A diverse sample of schools and students across England and Wales was achieved, including different types of special schools, independent and state, faith and non-faith, single and mixed sex schools and schools catering for different ages.

Seven mainstream and eight special schools participated in the online proforma, and of these, five mainstream and all eight special schools participated in the qualitative research. Further details of the sample of schools that took part in the research are set out in the introduction (Chapter 1).

Local authorities were sampled separately to the schools to preserve participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. The local authority sample was selected by geography and number of residential schools in their area. Those who expressed an interest in taking part were screened for eligibility (as those with previous or ongoing involvement with Inquiry investigations were not eligible to participate). Seven local authorities took part in the research by telephone.

Data collection, management and analysis

Online proforma

The online proforma collected data on schools’ safeguarding policies and anonymised information from their safeguarding logs about any recorded concerns with a sexual element. Its purpose was to explore the types of concerns that schools recorded, how these were responded to, and how they related to school policies and the qualitative data that were subsequently collected about each school’s safeguarding practice.

The proforma was administered online to a nominated lead at each school. Three schools took part in the pilot process; these schools and 12 others then completed the mainstage proforma data collection.

For each school, a single proforma was completed by the nominated lead. The proforma securely gathered information on residential schools’ approaches to and experiences of safeguarding children against child sexual abuse, including the types of queries, concerns and incidents of a sexual nature.

37 This included queries, concerns and incidents recorded as a single entry on their safeguarding log – all referred to as ‘concerns’ for the proforma. This was clarified in the proforma guidance and briefing to respondents.
or with a sexual element that were logged in schools’ safeguarding records. This included what and how information was recorded as well as, where relevant, how concerns were referred to external authorities.

Schools were each asked to provide details of up to ten relevant concerns over the last completed academic year: up to five that had warranted onward/external referral, selected in date order; then up to five other concerns with a sexual element recorded (selected in date order without reference to the level of severity or response process). The total number of concerns schools provided data about varied according to how many relevant records they had in their safeguarding log. It also gathered information on schools’ safeguarding policies.

Schools were asked to make sure they had access to safeguarding records from September 2017 onwards and were provided with detailed guidance about how the questionnaire should be completed. This included details about how to select incidents to report in the proforma and information about what should or should not be included.

In total, 15 schools completed the proforma and provided detailed information relating to 76 individual records of relevant concerns.

The proforma data were cleaned and then analysed using SPSS Statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to explore key differences between proforma variables. Data were broken down by school type (whether schools were mainstream or special) to explore whether any differences could be accounted for by the type of school.

Qualitative data collection

Qualitative interviews and focus groups took place face-to-face or by telephone. The fieldwork was scheduled according to schools’ and participants’ availability. Participating schools were each given £200 as a token of thanks for taking part. Interviews ranged from 20 to 100 minutes and explored a range of topics.

Tailored topic guides were used to ensure a consistent approach across all the interviews/focus groups and between members of the research team. The guides were used flexibly to allow researchers to respond to the nature and content of each discussion, so the topics covered and their order varied between interviews. Researchers used open, non-leading questions, and answers were fully probed to elicit greater depth and detail where necessary.

The safety and wellbeing of participants was a key consideration, which was undertaken with advice from both the Inquiry’s and NatCen’s Research Ethics Committees and the NSPCC on the research approach and materials, including around the detailed tailored disclosure protocol for the research. Fieldwork tools were designed to respond appropriately to the different needs of children by age and cognitive ability, for example, Easy Read consent forms and laminated flashcards for children to indicate their wish to pause or stop the interview. The research team liaised closely with participating schools to understand the requirements of involving particularly young or vulnerable children in their care, and was led by schools to determine which individuals could be invited to take part in the research encounters and how they were best supported. Interviews and focus groups were undertaken by researchers experienced in working with vulnerable populations (including children) and exploring sensitive topics.
Written consent was collected from participants at the start of each interview/focus group. With participants' consent, discussions were audio recorded on encrypted digital devices and transcribed verbatim (written notes were taken where consent was not given to record).

Transcripts were managed and analysed using Framework, a systematic approach to qualitative data management developed by NatCen and embedded in the software NVivo (Spencer et al., 2013). Systematic thematic analysis explored patterns and variation across participant groups and settings.

Interview quotations are used throughout the report to illustrate themes and research findings. Quotes are labelled according to the participant group and setting (local authority, mainstream school, or special school).
### Appendix B: Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuse – online</td>
<td>This relates to exploitation via images, voice, text, gaming. It includes image sharing and grooming, being shown inappropriate images, peer-on-peer abuse, intra-familial abuse and harmful sexual behaviour. See also: child sexual exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse, intra-familial abuse, and harmful sexual behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse – physical world</td>
<td>This relates to instances of exploitation such as telling a child to perform sexual services; having a child perform in indecent images; exchanging or purchasing indecent images of children. See also: child sexual exploitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)</td>
<td>A term used to describe a number of symptoms and behaviours which affects social interaction, communication, interests and behaviour. Also referred to as ‘Autistic spectrum disorder’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body mapping</td>
<td>Where bruises/marks on children’s bodies are recorded on a template and logged to facilitate the identification of physical harm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>A person under the age of 18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)</td>
<td>An umbrella term for all services that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child protection</td>
<td>Activity that is undertaken to protect children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child sexual abuse</td>
<td>Sexual abuse of children involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. The activities may involve physical contact and non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse including via the internet. Child sexual abuse includes child sexual exploitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child sexual exploitation</td>
<td>Sexual exploitation of children is a form of child sexual abuse. It involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child receives something, as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example, being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's home</td>
<td>An establishment that provides care and accommodation solely or mainly for children (meaning a person under the age of 18).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive ability</td>
<td>This refers to a range of mental processes and capability involving reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, complex idea comprehension, and learning from experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Designated safeguarding lead</strong></td>
<td>This is the person who is appointed in schools to lead the responsibility for their schools' safeguarding and child protection issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duty of care</strong></td>
<td>This refers to the moral and legal obligations of all workplaces, organisations and schools to ensure that everyone within the associated establishment is protected from physical or emotional harm, when engaging with the establishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early help referrals</strong></td>
<td>This refers to support which is given to a child (and their family) when a problem first emerges at any stage of a child or young person's life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education, health and care (EHC) plan</strong></td>
<td>A legal document which plans and describes a child or young person's special educational, social and health needs. It explains how these needs will be met in an educational setting and how this will help the young person to achieve their personal goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feasibility study</strong></td>
<td>A feasibility study tries to determine whether a study could be conducted easily and conveniently in the future. This can include whether the proposed study would be cost-effective, profitable, measurable and whether it would be useful to conduct such a study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female genital mutilation (FGM)</strong></td>
<td>This is where female genitals are cut, changed, or injured when there is no medical reasoning for this to occur.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grooming for child sexual abuse</strong></td>
<td>Building a relationship with a child in order to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Harmful sexual behaviour</strong></td>
<td>Sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is developmentally inappropriate, harmful towards self/others, abusive towards another child, young person or adult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent schools</strong></td>
<td>Schools run by charitable organisations, companies, or individuals who can charge fees for the education they provide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Schools Council (ISC)</strong></td>
<td>A non-profit organisation that represents over 1,300 schools in the UK's independent education sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instigator</strong></td>
<td>The term 'instigator' is used in this report to refer to an individual who initiated and carried out the activity recorded as a concern in the school's safeguarding log. This could be an adult perpetrator, or another child or young person (for example, a young person initiating an inappropriate sexual relationship with a peer). This term was used in the proforma to enable schools to provide data about all concerns with a sexual element, regardless of whether or not they were clearly considered child sexual abuse, and to give details about the different individuals involved in a concern. It should, however, be noted that there were some peer-on-peer concerns recorded where there was not a clear instigator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intra-familial abuse</strong></td>
<td>This refers to child sexual abuse that occurs within a family environment. The perpetrator(s) may or may not be related to the child but is seen as a part of the family from the child's point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law enforcement agencies</strong></td>
<td>Statutory agencies with responsibility for policing and intelligence, including police forces, the intelligence services and the National Crime Agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>An administrative body in local government that is responsible for all the public services and facilities in a particular area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority designated officer (LADO)</td>
<td>The LADO is responsible for managing all child protection allegations made against staff and volunteers who work with children and young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)</td>
<td>A multi-agency body set up in every local authority that is responsible for making sure that organisations, including police, health services, and local youth offending teams, are acting effectively to promote and safeguard children in the area. In July 2018 the government announced that these should be replaced by Safeguarding Partnerships in all areas by September 2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked after children</td>
<td>A child is legally defined as 'looked after' by a local authority if they: get accommodation from the local authority for a continuous period of more than 24 hours; are subject to a care order (to put the child into the care of the local authority); are subject to a placement order (to put the child up for adoption).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-on-peer abuse</td>
<td>Peer-on-peer abuse refers to concerns between children and can include physical and sexual abuse, sexual harassment and violence, emotional harm, online and offline bullying, teenage relationship abuse, grooming children for sexual and criminal exploitation. Peer-on-peer abuse is a type of sexually harmful behaviour. See also: harmful sexual behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of child sexual abuse</td>
<td>The proportion of a population who have experienced child sexual abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative fieldwork</td>
<td>A qualitative research method of data collection which aims to understand and interact with people. It can include conducting and collecting data in interviews, observations and case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAG rating (red, amber, green)</td>
<td>A widely-used way of tracking change in a given area of work. In this case, used to monitor and review the severity and risk of danger of child sexual abuse in a scenario. Red indicates high risk, amber indicates medium risk and green indicates little/no risk for a given incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential care</td>
<td>This relates to institutions such as orphanages, children's homes/residential care, secure children's homes, specialised residential care units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential school</td>
<td>A state or independent school providing care, education and boarding accommodation for some or all of its students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential special schools</td>
<td>Funded either by charities or other not-for-profit organisations or by private organisations, which charge fees. The majority of such places are paid for by the local authority because the child has an education, health and care (EHC) plan which names the school. Often, children attend these settings because of the extent and complexity of their needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Safeguarding | ● Protecting children from maltreatment;  
● Preventing impairment of children’s health or development;  
● Ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and  
● Taking actions to enable all children to have the best life chances. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safeguarding Partners</td>
<td>In England, Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards (LSCBs), the bodies responsible for local safeguarding from 2006, were replaced in September 2019. In the new system, health, social services and the police are each designated Safeguarding Partners. They have a shared and equal responsibility to work together with the wider multi-agency team (including education) in local areas to put systems and processes in place to safeguard all children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special educational needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEND</td>
<td>Special educational needs and disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (demographic characteristic)</td>
<td>Refers to the biological differences between males and females.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexting (sexualised image sharing)</td>
<td>The sharing of sexualised images, including sexualised selfies and sharing images between people, also known as ‘youth-produced sexual imagery’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>Sexual assault is an act in which a person intentionally sexually touches another person without that person’s consent, or coerces or physically forces a person to engage in a sexual act against their will. It is a form of sexual violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual health clinics</td>
<td>Include a range of services, such as advice about sexual health, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and help for people who have been sexually assaulted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
<td>Sexual violence is any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act by violence or coercion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational approaches</td>
<td>Including management of the physical environment and use of practical barriers to prevent particular behaviour.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)</td>
<td>Indicators of children and young people with SEMH problems include anxiety, low mood, being withdrawn and isolated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs)</td>
<td>This refers to a teacher who coordinates the provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist support organisations (for child sexual abuse)</td>
<td>These services work with children and young people who have experienced abuse. Examples include Barnardo’s and NSPCC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory agencies/services</td>
<td>Institutions set up by law to carry out public activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural approaches</td>
<td>Including recruitment practices, policies and external monitoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims and survivors</td>
<td>Defined in this report as individuals who have been sexually abused as children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whistleblow(ing)</td>
<td>When a worker discloses information concerning wrongdoing as they believe they are acting in the public interest, and that the disclosure shows past, present or likely future wrongdoing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young person</td>
<td>See: child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


