

# **Child sexual abuse in residential schools: A literature review**

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

November 2018

# **Child sexual abuse in residential schools: A literature review**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the literature review

The purpose of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA or ‘the Inquiry’) is to investigate whether public bodies and other non-state institutions have taken seriously their responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse in England and Wales, 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 launched 13 investigations into a broad range of institutions. The Residential Schools Investigation will investigate the nature and extent of, and institutional responses to, child sexual abuse in residential schools, including schools in the state and independent sectors and schools for children with disabilities and/or special educational needs.

This literature review summarises the research literature on child sexual abuse (including child sexual exploitation) in residential schools. The aim is to provide an overview of what is already known, specifically in relation to child sexual abuse that occurs within residential schools, their role in safeguarding children from sexual abuse and the role they play in protecting children from sexual abuse in general. The review also draws on literature relating to non-residential schools from all sectors (see the methodology section for an overview of the types of schools this covers).

Key terms used in the literature review can be found in the Glossary.

### Relevant standards for keeping children safe from sexual abuse in schools:

- In England and Wales a multitude of Acts and secondary legislation, as well as statutory and non-statutory guidance, are in place to protect and safeguard children from sexual abuse in schools.

### Scale and nature of child sexual abuse in schools:

- Understanding the scale and nature of child sexual abuse in schools is challenging, however several studies have attempted to provide an insight into its prevalence.
- Data from the UK-wide Operation Hydrant into allegations of non-recent child sexual abuse identified that 39.5% of the 2,750 institutions on the database of Operation Hydrant are schools, making schools the most common location for this form of abuse.
- Of the 520 participants who shared their experiences with the Inquiry’s Truth Project between June 2016 and December 2017, 27% (n=140) were abused in a school setting, making it the most common institutional environment for the reported abuse for those accounts where a setting was recorded. Almost a quarter of participants (23%, n=117) reported that they were abused by teaching or educational staff. These figures are based on a sample of victims and survivors who have come forward of their own volition, and are thus not representative.
- Research commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in England between 2009 and 2010 found that 38% (n=4,642) of all allegations referred to Local Authority Designated Officers involved school staff, and that of these a fifth related to sexual abuse.
- The awareness of peer on peer sexual abuse is growing, although it can be challenging for schools and teaching staff to identify and recognise this as abuse.
- Research has indicated that both bullying and sexual harassment can create environments within schools that are conducive to the growth of peer on peer abuse.

- Research into peer on peer abuse within residential schools has suggested that these institutions can increase the risk of such abuse, owing to the increased periods of time pupils spend together unsupervised by a member of staff.
- The limited studies in this area have identified that whilst perpetrators of abuse who are educational staff are predominantly male, abuse by female educational staff is a larger problem than has previously been acknowledged. Research has also indicated that teachers who sexually abuse students are often respected, even celebrated, teachers who have gained the trust of children, parents and the community.
- Children with learning disabilities appear to be over-represented amongst children who sexually harm others. Institutional and wider societal discomfort with the idea of disabled children's sexuality, as well as misconception that a disability causes an individual to be asexual or 'childlike', or aggressively and uncontrollably sexual, can play a role in this over-representation.
- Sexual violence within schools is a gendered issue, with females appearing to represent the larger victim group of both abuse perpetrated by school staff and via peer on peer abuse.
- Research indicates that the abuse of females is more likely to be reported than the abuse of males.
- There is evidence to suggest that there are some contexts where males may be particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, such as single-sex residential schools.
- Research also suggests that as with mainstream residential schools, the closed nature of special residential schools can facilitate the under-reporting of child sexual abuse.
- There is also a consensus that disabled children are at a greater risk of sexual abuse than their non-disabled peers, and most estimates put this increased risk at around three times that of non-disabled children.

#### **Factors that influence the incidence and response to child sexual abuse in schools:**

- A school's culture, power imbalances between staff and pupils, a lack of confidence in addressing sexual abuse, and the over-reliance that some schools place upon child disclosure in order to identify abuse have all been identified as factors that can inhibit a school's approach towards successful prevention, identification and reporting of child sexual abuse.

#### **Unsuccessful safeguarding measures and positive approaches:**

- Factors which can contribute to the incidence of child sexual abuse include the challenges for school staff in identifying it, failures to act upon it, failures to follow the relevant standards to ensure child safety, and breakdowns in cooperation between schools, parents and external agencies.
- Whilst child sexual abuse within schools does occur, there are many examples of schools addressing and mitigating its occurrence. Notably, an increasing understanding by both pupils, teachers and other staff of the nature and extent of sexual abuse can create a culture of openness within a school that aids the disclosure of abuse and provides support. There are also so-called 'whole school' approaches that foster close positive working relations between governing bodies, staff, children and parents/carers.



**Gaps, limitations and caveats of existing research:**

- Whilst evidence exists on sexual abuse in schools, there is a dearth of research on child sexual abuse and peer on peer sexual abuse in mainstream boarding schools, as well as the sexual abuse of disabled children in special residential schools.

## 1.2 Methodology

A literature review was conducted using the search terms set out in Appendix 1. Both academic and non-academic databases and general internet searches were used to identify literature, and a list can be found in Appendix 2.

The review focused on secondary sources, and the literature reviewed ranged from English-language peer-reviewed academic journals, to reports, books and 'grey literature', including policy documents published by the UK and Welsh Governments. The initial literature search was carried out between May and June 2018. Additional literature was identified through reviewing the bibliographical references of the research identified in original searches up to August 2018. Relevance to the subject and methodological rigour were considered in attributing weight to different sources. Where necessary, caveats have been added to the description of the research to highlight limitations in the studies.

The review focuses on recent literature published between 2000 and 2018, with some relevant literature pre-2000 also included. Similarly, whilst there was a focus on evidence from England and Wales, relevant evidence from other jurisdictions (including the USA, Australia and Canada), as well as the UK as a whole, are also drawn on; in particular where there is a lack of data or evidence at an English or Welsh level. Where research comes from other jurisdictions this is noted in the review and readers should be aware that findings from such studies may not apply to England and Wales.

Where possible, the literature review focuses on material specifically related to residential schools. However, owing to the current lack of research on residential schools, research relating to non-residential schools has also been included in order to consider wider learning from other educational sectors. It is important for readers to note that this constitutes the majority of the research summarised. The types of schools covered in this literature review include both special and mainstream residential schools, but also non-residential schools, including community, foundation and voluntary schools, academies, private and grammar schools. Both primary and secondary schools are included, but it is not always clear in the existing literature which age groups of pupils are being referred to. Where not specified, readers should assume that references to schools relate to all schools (i.e. not specifically residential schools).

## 1.3 Limitations

This literature review has not adopted a systematic review methodology; does not provide a fully comprehensive summary of the existing evidence base; and does not seek to provide new analysis. Due to the paucity of literature available, lower quality sources of information, such as media items, are presented here (with relevant caveats) alongside more robust studies. As noted above, data in relation to other jurisdictions and other school types has been included and there is a limitation to the extent to which such data applies to residential schools in England and Wales.



Whilst included in the definition of child sexual abuse used for the purposes of this paper, there was a lack of literature identified which related specifically to child sexual exploitation in residential schools. A further limitation of the literature review is that express consideration has not been given to this form of child sexual abuse. Further limitations related to the evidence base are set out in the final chapter of this paper.



## 2 Pupils attending residential schools

## 2.1 Mainstream boarding schools

Data from the DfE indicates that there are 693 non-specialist boarding schools in England as at September 2018 (GOV.UK, 2018a):

- 11% are single-sex boys' schools and 8% are single-sex girls' schools.

Data from StatsWales indicates that there are 26 independent non-specialist boarding schools in Wales as at 2018 (StatsWales, 2018a):

- 8% are single-sex boys' schools and 8% are single-sex girls' schools.

The Independent Schools Council (ISC) census for 2017 (Parkes et al, 2017) reports:

- 478 boarding schools are members of the ISC, with a total of 70,281 pupils (13.4% of all pupils at ISC schools).
- 74% of ISC boarding schools have fewer than half their pupils boarding and only 3% of schools are exclusively boarding.
- There are 38,913 boys and 31,368 girls boarding at ISC schools. Most co-educational independent schools have a higher percentage of boys than girls.
- The proportion of pupils from an ethnic minority at independent schools (boarding and day) is similar to that of the state sector at 32%.

## 2.2 Residential special schools

In 2017 there were 4,878 children and young people boarding in 334 residential special schools and colleges in England (Lenehan and Geraghty, 2017).

In Wales in 2018 there were 100 pupils boarding at 6 special schools (StatsWales, 2018b). Further data on the residential special schools population in Wales is not available.

The most recent data on the composition of residential special schools in England is from 2014 (Children's Commissioner for England, 2014); as of this date, independent schools were the largest type of residential special school in England, making up 47% of the total and providing 38% of such boarding places. Of the 62% of residential special school pupils not in independent schools and who board<sup>1</sup>:

- 60% are aged between 12 and 16 years.
- 75% are male, 25% are female.
- The most common reason for a Special Educational Needs statement in 2014 was behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (29%). Autism spectrum disorder (18%) and hearing impairment (14%) were the next most common reasons.
- Just over a quarter of boarders had a home address that was more than 20 miles away from their school.

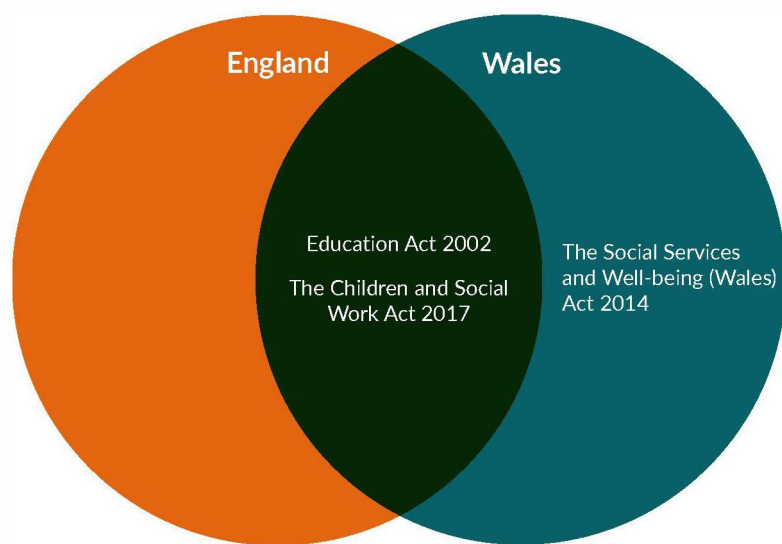
<sup>1</sup> Equivalent data on independent schools is not available.



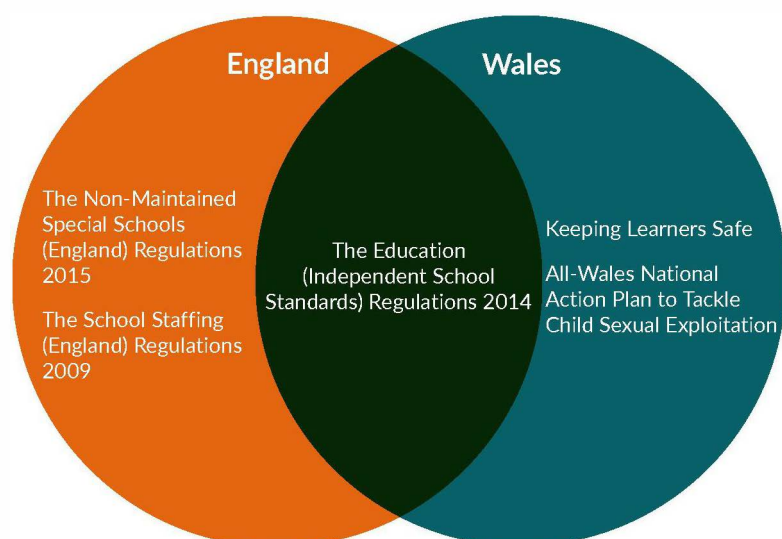
### 3 Relevant standards for keeping children safe from child sexual abuse in schools

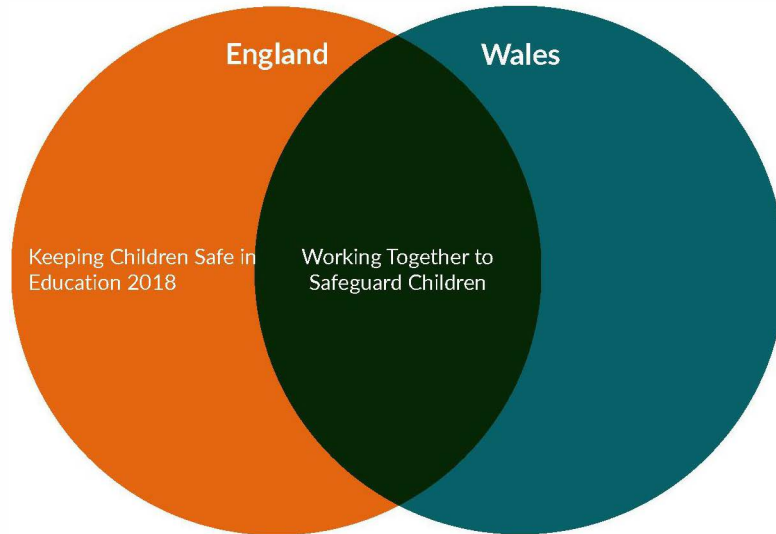
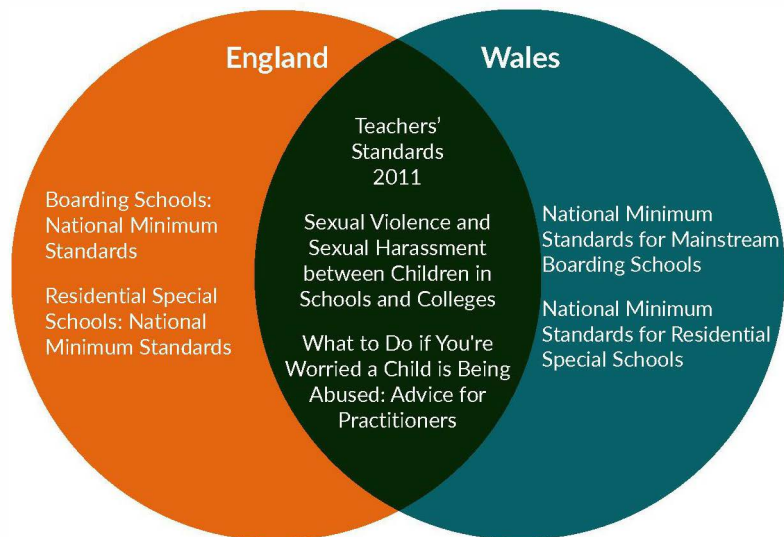
This chapter presents a brief overview of the legislation and guidance applicable to schools in England and Wales in relation to safeguarding children from child sexual abuse in schools. The legislation and guidance outlined covers primary legislation (Figure 3.1), secondary legislation (Figure 3.2), statutory guidance (Figure 3.3), and non-statutory guidance and professional codes of practice (Figure 3.4). This does not represent an exhaustive list of all relevant legislation and guidance in England and Wales. This overview is provided for context; the legislation and guidance mentioned has not been subject to detailed consideration as part of this review. Education and training is a devolved matter in the UK, with the UK Government being responsible for England, and the Welsh Government being responsible for Wales.

**Figure 3.1:** Primary legislation for keeping children safe from child sexual abuse in schools



**Figure 3.2:** Secondary legislation for keeping children safe from child sexual abuse in schools



**Figure 3.3:** Statutory guidance for keeping children safe from child sexual abuse in schools**Figure 3.4:** Non-statutory guidance and professional codes of practice for keeping children safe from child sexual abuse in schools

An overview of the relevant standards in England and Wales can be found in Appendix 3.



## 4 Scale and nature of child sexual abuse in schools



## 4.1 Research that attempts to understand the scale and nature of child sexual abuse in residential schools

Research has indicated that understanding the scale and nature of child sexual abuse within schools is challenging. Although the focus of this literature review is on residential schools, there is not much evidence on the scale and nature of child sexual abuse within that specific sector and therefore sources about child sexual abuse in all school types have been included. It should be noted that many of the points here relate to problems in understanding the scale and nature of child sexual abuse more generally in all contexts. There are also many wider challenges with understanding the scale and nature of child sexual abuse generally which would apply equally to the school context. This section does not seek to provide an overview of these wider challenges.

Sexual abuse within schools can be perpetrated by a member of school staff, as either a professional or volunteer, and includes teachers or any adult in contact with children within a school setting. Abuse can also happen between those under the age of 18 within schools, often defined as 'peer on peer abuse'. It is important to note that peer on peer abuse is not restricted to the school context, but schools can be the environment where it takes place, or where victims and perpetrators meet each other.

Victims are often reluctant to disclose their experiences of child sexual abuse, meaning that such incidences remain hidden. Two-thirds of those who are abused never disclose this to an official agency (Kelly and Karsna, 2017). Disclosures often do not occur until the victim reaches adulthood, meaning that there is a time lag between the perpetration, reporting and recording of the abuse (Children's Commissioner for England, 2015).

Some teachers are reluctant to report their suspicions of sexual abuse being perpetrated by school staff, given the negative effects that allegations might have upon the staff member (Shakeshaft, 2013). Schools may also fail to refer reports of abuse on to external agencies (Firmin, 2015) or the police (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016), and may not have a clear understanding of the correct referral pathways and thresholds for reporting harmful sexual behaviour (Firmin et al, 2016), since training is neither mandatory nor regulated.

The definition of child sexual abuse has created problems in the recording of such cases. Guidance issued in 2017 by the DfE states that the definition of child sexual abuse should be combined with child sexual exploitation (DfE, 2017), an approach which, it is argued, increases the difficulty of delineating, measuring and identifying solely child sexual abuse cases. Furthermore, the numerous overlapping elements that exist between child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation create inconsistencies between the agencies who record such cases (Kelly and Karsna, 2017).

Compounding these issues is the lack of centralised data on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). Those studies that rely on accessing records of child sexual abuse and those which ask individuals directly about child sexual abuse tend to under-report its incidence. They may also not provide a representative picture of the nature of child sexual abuse or the characteristics of victims and perpetrators, because some types of abuse and victims, or groups of victims, may be more likely to be under-reported than others. This caveat should be kept in mind by readers. Despite these challenges, a limited number of sources have sought to establish the incidence of child sexual abuse within schools.

Operation Hydrant, a UK investigation by the police into allegations of non-recent child sexual abuse involving an institution, organisation or a person of public prominence, commenced in 2014. As at June 2018, 39.5% of the 2,750 institutions on the database of Operation Hydrant were schools, making

such institutions the most common location for this form of abuse (NPCC, 2018). Information on the nature of the abuse (school staff or peer on peer, for example) or the type of school in question is not available. Additionally, the database covers only cases that have been reviewed by Operation Hydrant, and is thus not nationally representative.

The Inquiry's Truth Project provides a platform for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to share their experiences. Of the 520 participants who shared their experiences with the Inquiry between June 2016 and December 2017, 27% (n=140) were abused in a school setting, making it the most common institutional environment for the reported abuse for those accounts where a setting was recorded. Almost a quarter of participants (23%, n=117) reported that they were abused by teaching or educational staff. These figures are based on a sample of victims and survivors who have come forward of their own volition, and are thus not representative. Information was not analysed on the type of school (IICSA, 2018).

Research commissioned by the DfE analysed allegations referred to Local Authority Designated Officers for most local authorities in England (116 out of 152) between 2009 and 2010. Allegations against school staff (school teachers, non-teaching school staff and further education teachers) made up 38% (n=4,642) of all allegations in this period. Over a fifth (22%) of the 4,642 allegations related to sexual abuse (York Consulting LLP, 2012).

Analysis by Shakeshaft of a 2001 survey by the American Association of University Women found that 9.6% (n=150) of students at grades 8–11 (ages 13–17 years) have experienced unwanted educator sexual misconduct (a category ranging from 'sexual jokes, comments or looks' to being 'forced to do something sexual other than kissing') (Shakeshaft, 2004; American Association of University Women, 2001). Caution should be employed when applying such findings to the UK, given their US origin.

With regards to abuse perpetrated by school staff in the UK, research undertaken in 2000 on 20,000 child protection referrals to social services or the police between January 1988 and December 1992 identified that less than 1% were perpetrated within an institutional setting, and that, of these, 31% (n=6,200) were cases that were linked to a school. The study found that 31% (n=20) of the 65 substantiated institutional child sexual abuse cases referred to the local authority occurred in a school, with only two related to boarding schools. In 20% (n=13) of cases, the perpetrator was a teacher, with social workers and hostel workers making up the remaining perpetrators (Gallagher, 2000). Given the age of the data that was used in the study, caution should be taken when applying it to a contemporary setting. Additionally, no information was provided as to the type of schools in which the alleged sexual abuse was committed.

A temporary helpline set up by Childline in 1991, specifically for children at boarding schools, received 155 calls relating to sexual abuse over six months. This represents 15% of all calls received (n=1,012). In addition, 35 (3%) of calls related to sexual harassment (D'Ancona, 1992). A later Childline study analysing data from its main helpline from 1995 to 1996 found that, of the 289 callers who had mentioned that they were at boarding school, 8% (n=23) mentioned sexual abuse as one of the reasons for the call, and just over a third of the calls about sexual abuse related to sexual abuse by a teacher (Childline, 1997). While this is an opportunistic, unrepresentative sample, it gives an indication that child sexual abuse in boarding schools was an issue at least at the time this data was collected.

## 4.2 Attempts by the media to establish the scale of child sexual abuse in schools

Sexual abuse in schools, and boarding schools in particular, has been the subject of considerable media interest, and a number of media sources have attempted to investigate the scale of the problem. While such data is unlikely to give an accurate picture of the prevalence of child sexual abuse in schools, it is cited here due to the lack of other robust research sources. Readers should, however, keep in mind that there are a number of problems with such data. These include a lack of transparency around the definitions used – for example, the definitions of child sexual abuse – and a lack of information on the factors that may influence the differences between reported figures and the actual incidence – for example, changes or variation in police recording practices.

A 2017 Freedom of Information (FOI) request on sexual abuse in boarding schools made by ITV to every police force in the UK revealed that 425 people have been accused of carrying out ‘sexual attacks’ at UK boarding schools since 2012, with 160 of these having been charged. Just over half of the forces responded (24 in total), suggesting that the total figure is likely to be higher (ITV, 2018).

Analysis by *The Independent* newspaper in 2017 of information received through another FOI request revealed that 42 teachers were issued prohibition orders because of sexual misconduct in 2016–2017, up from 31 the year before and 35 in 2014–2015. A third of teachers prohibited from teaching in 2016 were due to ‘sex-related cases’ (*The Independent*, 2017). Information on whether the misconduct was between teachers, or was in relation to the sexual abuse of pupils, was not provided. Information was not provided on how many of these teachers were prohibited for sexual abuse committed outside of the education environment.

An FOI request made as part of a 2016 *Tes* (formerly known as the *Times Educational Supplement*) investigation revealed that sexual offences reported in schools have more than tripled between 2012 and 2016, with an 18% increase between 2015 and 2016 (*Tes*, 2017). Information is not provided on how many of these cases involved school staff as the alleged perpetrator, or how many were as a result of peer on peer abuse. Information is also not provided on the type of schools in which these offences were allegedly perpetrated.

The increase in reports may also suggest increased reporting of abuse rather than an increase in the incidence of abuse. There is a lack of data to definitively show that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is increasing (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

The very nature of residential schools might also affect the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse. Staff responsible for boarding pupils have an elevated level of access to these children, in contrast to non-residential schools. This access encompasses duties and tasks that do not occur in non-residential schools, including organising bedtime routines, as well as involvement with the children’s bathing and dressing, all of which may present opportunities for abuse (Parkinson and Cashmore, 2017). This access will also occur over a longer period of time, with school staff spending increased periods of time with pupils, and in some cases co-residing in close proximity, exacerbating the risk of abuse.

The amount of time a young person spends within an institution may also be a risk factor for child sexual abuse (Kaufman and Erooga, 2016), something which is naturally greater for pupils within a residential school.

The closed nature of residential schools, often being cut off from the wider community to an extent not encountered by non-residential schools, as well as pupils’ separation from their families and the support that they can offer, can all increase abuse risk factors (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a).

### 4.3 Residential special schools

Residential special schools make special educational provision and provide accommodation for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (DfE, 2015b).

As with mainstream residential schools, the closed nature of special residential schools can facilitate the under-reporting of child sexual abuse (Brown, 2010). There is also a consensus that disabled children are at a greater risk of sexual abuse than their non-disabled peers, and most estimates put this increased risk at around three times that of non-disabled children (Parker, 2013; Brown, 2010; Kvam, 2004; Sullivan and Knutson, 2000). A meta-analysis of 12 electronic databases covering data on the risk of violence (including sexual violence) towards disabled children from 1990 and 2010 identified that children with learning disabilities experienced a greater risk of abuse than children with other disabilities (Jones et al, 2012).

A number of reasons have been suggested for the higher rates of victimisation of disabled children (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1:** Reasons for the victimisation of disabled children in residential special schools

Issue	Description	Studies undertaken
Societal attitudes	Societal attitudes may mean that children with disabilities are not considered to be potential victims of sexual abuse or are not considered reliable witnesses or believed	Brown, 2010; Paul and Cawson, 2002
Communication problems	Communication problems can make it harder for children to disclose abuse and for abuse to be identified	Parker, 2013; Paul et al, 2004; Paul and Cawson, 2002
Carer dependence	Disabled children may be dependent on carers for intimate/ personal care	Parker, 2013; Paul et al, 2004; Paul and Cawson, 2002
Multiple carers	Children with disabilities may be exposed to multiple professional carers, increasing their risk of exposure to abuse	Parker, 2013; Brown, 2010; Paul and Cawson, 2002
Trust	Children with learning disabilities may be particularly trusting of adults	The Children's Society, 2009; Paul et al, 2004
Ability to challenge abuse	Many disabled children are taught not to question people in a position of authority, leading to an unwillingness to challenge potentially abusive situations	UK Voice et al, 2001
Awareness and knowledge	Lack of sexual awareness and knowledge	Parker, 2013; The Children's Society 2009
Isolation from family	Institutionalisation and isolation from family put children with disabilities at increased risk of abuse	Parker, 2013; The Children's Society, 2009; Paul and Cawson, 2002
Time spent within institutions	Children with disabilities may spend longer periods of time within institutions than their non-disabled peers, increasing their risk of exposure to abuse	Llewellyn et al, 2016
One-to-one attention	Children with disabilities often receive more one-to-one attention from staff	Caldas and Bensy, 2014



Children with learning disabilities appear to be over-represented amongst children who sexually harm others (Bailey and Boswell, 2002; Manocha and Mezey, 1998; James and Neil, 1997; Bagley, 1992). Studies have found that between a half and a fifth of young people referred to specialist services for sexually harmful behaviour have a learning disability. This may be due in part to higher levels of reporting and referrals as a result of the increased professional monitoring that disabled children are subject to, and the limited professional capacity to deal with issues around disabled children and sexuality (Hackett et al, 2013; Fyson, 2009). Additionally, institutional and wider societal discomfort with the idea of disabled children's sexuality, as well as misconception that a disability causes an individual to be asexual or 'childlike', or aggressively and uncontrollably sexual (Murphy and Young, 2005; Berman et al, 1999), can also play a role in this over-representation.

Few studies have been carried out into the specific risk of sexual abuse for children at residential special schools. Research by Fyson (2007) drew upon 40 surveys of special schools in England, 10 follow-up interviews with school staff and a 12-month prospective survey of all known (to statutory welfare agencies) cases of sexual abuse committed by a young person with a learning disability. The study found that 88% of special schools had experienced sexually inappropriate pupil behaviour (sexualised language or one-off incidents of inappropriate touching), 65% reported such incidents occur at least once per term, and 19% that these incidences arose on a weekly basis. Although not providing information on the type of abuse (whether directed at school staff or peers), the schools revealed that such actions included inappropriate touching in 85% of cases, and actual or attempted bodily penetration in 15% of cases.

Research from the Netherlands of 104 professionals working in Dutch residential care institutions for children with mild learning difficulties found that the rate of sexual abuse for these children was significantly higher than for non-disabled children in residential care, and that 55% of victims were abused by one of their peers at the same residential facility (Euser et al, 2016). In one Norwegian study of the sexual abuse of deaf children, self-administered questionnaires were sent out to all 1,150 adult members of the Norwegian Deaf Register in 1999. Just over half of the deaf participants in the study who reported having been sexually abused reported that the abuse was in connection with a residential school for the deaf (Kvam, 2004).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned studies, there exists a general lack of evidence that covers the extent of abuse of disabled children in residential schools (NSPCC, 2014) within England and Wales and also internationally.

#### 4.4 Peer on peer abuse

Data from the National Police Chiefs' Council obtained through a call for evidence revealed that around a third of child sexual abuse offences reported to the police relate to alleged offenders who were under 18 years old, and are thus classified as peer on peer abuse (Parliament.uk, 2016a). Just over a quarter of calls to the aforementioned Childline Boarding School Line about sexual abuse related to sexual abuse carried out by another child (Barter, 1997). Research has also shown that both bullying and sexual harassment can create environments within schools that are conducive to the growth of peer on peer abuse (Firmin and Curtis, 2015; Ringrose et al, 2011).

Statutory guidance on peer on peer abuse has been provided to schools through documents such as *Keeping Children Safe in Education*. The most recent version was published in September 2018. The inclusion of a chapter specifically on peer on peer abuse within this document from 2016 onwards illustrates a growing acknowledgement of this form of abuse. Firmin has expanded on this point, noting that whilst research has demonstrated that peer on peer abuse within schools far exceeds the annual number of allegations made against school staff, the majority of statutory guidance continues to focus upon abuse perpetrated by school staff (Firmin, 2018a).

An FOI request by the BBC revealed that in the academic years 2012–2015 more than 5,500 sexual assaults allegedly perpetrated in UK schools were reported to the police (BBC News, 2015). At least one-fifth of these offences were reportedly perpetrated by children against children (Parliament.uk, 2016b). Despite these figures, it is important to note that problems in recording cases of sexual abuse, as well as a frequent reluctance to record such incidents, mean that this total may fail to reflect the true extent of such cases. Additionally, information was not provided on the type of schools.

Whilst there is a lack of data on peer on peer sexual abuse within a residential school setting (Kaufman and Erooga, 2016), limited research has been undertaken on the risk factors of such abuse within these institutions. Studies have found that there is an increased risk of peer on peer abuse within residential schools, as children of different ages are together, and especially reside together, for a longer duration in an environment that lacks the protective element of a parent (Margolin and Craft, 1990). Additionally, pupils spend a greater period of time together alone, unseen by staff members, creating opportunities for abuse to occur.

#### 4.5 Gender and age of perpetrators and victims of peer on peer abuse

Studies have indicated that girls experience peer on peer sexual violence and harassment to a greater degree than boys (Firmin, 2018a). A 2010 US selected sample survey of 1,002 girls and 963 boys in grades 7–12 (ages 12–18), from both private and public schools, revealed that a higher proportion of female school students reported having been sexually harassed than male students. Additionally, 66% of students who reported having been sexually harassed reported that their harasser was a male student or group of male students, in contrast to only 19% identifying a female student or group of female students (American Association of University Women, 2010).

Figures released by Childline reveal that, for 2016/2017, girls were provided with almost four times as many counselling sessions for peer on peer sexual abuse than boys (2,402 to 268, respectively) (NSPCC, 2018). This statistic, however, does not identify where this form of abuse was perpetrated. In general male victims are, however, less likely to report sexual abuse and exploitation (Smeaton, 2013), so figures may underestimate the scale of peer on peer abuse of boys.

Within the same sample of Childline counselling sessions, peer on peer sexual abuse among primary school children was most commonly one-off incidents, including being touched inappropriately by another child or seeing another child expose themselves. For the older children in the sample, this abuse at school generally took place over a longer period of time and involved sexual bullying, sexually explicit language and threats of sexual abuse. These findings are based upon the 72% of Childline's counselling sessions where the age of the child was available. It should be noted that 88% of the counselling sessions were held with children over the age of 12 years, and that for those sessions concerning peer sexual abuse, 96% were with children aged over 12 (NSPCC, 2018).

#### 4.6 Role of technology

A qualitative study on sexting carried out in two inner-city London schools found that technology facilitated the sexual abuse, harassment and objectification of girls, and that girls were more likely to be adversely affected than boys (Ringrose et al, 2011). The relatively small sample of two schools that were examined in this study means that caution should be exercised when generalising from these findings.

The Women and Equalities Committee report (2016) on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools noted that the means for enabling and facilitating such abuse (technological advances, access to pornographic and online platforms) have increased, and have thus compounded the problem of sexual harassment.

## 4.7 Characteristics of perpetrators

Child sexual abuse within schools can be perpetrated by members of the school staff, school visitors or by students (as discussed previously). It can be difficult to identify perpetrators, though a number of studies have considered the characteristics of adult perpetrators of child sexual abuse within schools.

A variety of studies have identified that within educational institutions males are the predominant perpetrators of sexual abuse (Mototsune, 2015; Jaffe et al, 2013; Moulden et al, 2010), with females being the victims (Mototsune, 2015; Moulden et al, 2010; Shakeshaft, 2004).

There are no existing empirically-based typologies describing adult males who specifically sexually abuse in institutions (Proeve et al, 2016). A categorisation of females who sexually abuse children in organisations has, however, recently been developed (Darling et al, 2018) which describes five categories of offenders who differ in their characteristics, motivation and approach to the abuse. Research has also indicated that teachers who sexually abuse students are often respected, even celebrated, teachers who have gained the trust of children, parents and the community (Erooga, 2012; Shakeshaft, 2004).

One UK study found that school staff with under 2 years or more than 16 years of service were more likely to have allegations of sexual abuse made against them (Erooga, 2012), although in the case of those with more years of experience this can reflect that there has been more opportunity to perpetrate abuse. There is limited data on rate of offending for different types of teacher, although research conducted in the USA indicates that sports coaches and music teachers may be more likely to offend (Simpson, 2010; Shakeshaft, 2004; Jennings and Tharp, 2003).

Drawing upon a wide range of studies in the USA, it has been shown that the majority of perpetrators of child sexual abuse in schools are male (Shakeshaft, 2004). A US study that explored the differences between male and female teachers who had committed sexual offences against their students reviewed public records in the south-eastern USA from 2007 to 2011. This data indicated that male perpetrators were more likely to offend against younger students (under 13 years old) and female perpetrators against older students (over 12 years old) (Ratliff and Watson, 2014). Whilst the research provides an insight into the composition of offenders in one location, robust generalisations to the UK cannot be made from it due to the narrow nature of the research and its US context.

A review of criminal justice system data as well as empirical research studies has revealed that whilst females make up the minority of sexual offenders, offences committed by female teachers against adolescents within the educational system is a far larger problem than previously acknowledged (Solis and Benedek, 2012). A study of US child protection services cases also found that 19% of abusers in professional positions of trust were female (McLeod, 2015).

Content analysis research undertaken by Darling et al (2018) drew upon public records, such as court and tribunal reports, of cases of 71 women from the UK who sexually abused children whilst working in an organisational setting (which included an educational setting) between 2000 and 2016. It was found that the female offenders generally offended alone and had no previous criminal records or employment concerns. Unlike many male perpetrators considered in previous research, the women in the study were not predatory paedophiles who sought to gain access to children from the outset, but were '*professionals without underlying intent or sexual motivation*' (Darling et al, 2018, p.14) who went on to engage in sexually abusive behaviour. The situational and environmental factors in organisational settings along with contextual factors in the lives and circumstances of the women in the study were considered to be key to abuse the perpetrated.



Similar to findings of other female sex offender studies, these women experienced unstable lifestyles, relationship difficulties, low self-esteem, isolation and loneliness. However, they differed in having lower levels of substance abuse and mental health problems and in being generally older on average with higher socio-economic status (Darling et al, 2018). Overall both male and female sexual offenders within an institutional setting (including schools) are older, possess higher IQs, and report fewer adverse childhood experiences in contrast to child sex offenders in general (Darling and Antonopoulos, 2013).

'Professional perpetrators' (a category that includes teachers) have been described as employing sophisticated grooming techniques and are able to groom and manipulate families and institutions in order to gain their trust (CEOP, 2013; Colton et al, 2011; McAlinden, 2006; Sullivan and Beech, 2002). Studies that have looked at the characteristics of these perpetrators report conflicting opinions and evidence on whether perpetrators deliberately choose careers where they will have more access to children, or whether abuse is opportunistic (CEOP, 2013; Colton et al, 2011; Sullivan and Beech, 2004). The pastoral role often required when working with children also plays a part in providing professional perpetrators with opportunities to abuse children and helping them to screen their behaviour (Colton et al, 2011).

Regarding residential schools, research undertaken by Parkinson and Cashmore (2017), which drew upon secondary data in order to assess the different levels of risk in institutions (including residential schools), identified that whilst women do sexually abuse children, the majority of such abuse is perpetrated by males. Consequently, institutions with a greater number of male staff have a greater risk of such abuse occurring than organisations with a larger female staff population. As single-sex residential schools for boys are likely to have a greater number of male staff, the report suggests that there is likely to be an increased risk of such abuse occurring within boys' schools.

Studies that have considered the perpetrators of peer on peer abuse, not limited to the school setting, have found that it is predominantly perpetrated by young men on similarly aged young women, or younger children (Hackett, 2014).

## 4.8 Characteristics of victims

This section presents information from the literature reviewed on the age and gender of victims of child sexual abuse in schools. There was a lack of information in the literature identified on other victim characteristics such as ethnicity, sexuality and family background.

Research indicates that sexual violence in schools is a gendered issue, with males most likely to be the perpetrator and females representing the larger victim group (DfE, 2018a). This is especially apparent when considering peer on peer abuse.

A survey carried out by YouGov in the UK in 2010, using a large representative sample, found that 21% of 16–18-year-olds had experienced unwanted sexual touching at school. The prevalence was higher for girls (29%) than boys (14%) (YouGov, 2010). In addition, the majority (71%) of respondents reported that they had heard sexual name-calling towards girls at school daily or a few times per week. Information was not provided as to the nature of the abuse and if the perpetrator was an adult or another pupil.

Regarding residential schools, just under 30% of all the calls to the Childline Boarding School Line were from boys, around half of the calls about sexual abuse were from girls (D'Ancona, 1992). Again, information was not provided on whether this abuse was specifically peer on peer, or committed by school staff.

Research by Shakeshaft (2004), which analysed six studies that examined abuse by teaching staff, identified that the abuse of females was more readily reported than the abuse of males, and that the *'differences between the percentages of males and females who are abused may be much smaller than previously thought'* (Shakeshaft, 2004, p.28).

Literature reviews have shown that there are some contexts where males are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, notably in single-sex residential schools (Radford, 2018; Wescott and Clement, 1992). It is, however, important to note that there is a lack of information on the sexual abuse of boys, as many studies have focused solely on the experiences of women and girls (Radford, 2018).

The previously mentioned content analysis research by Darling et al (2018) found that the victims of female-perpetrated child sexual abuse in organisations were predominantly male, and aged between 15 and 16 years, with the abuse of prepubescent children being rare. The research also identified that over a quarter of female perpetrators abused female victims. Victims (of both genders) were also often found to have particular vulnerabilities.

Research undertaken by Mototsune (2015) in Ontario, Canada, which examined cases of teacher sexual misconduct between 2000 and 2013, found that the abuse of male primary school pupils by male teachers was undertaken over a significantly longer period of time than male teachers who abused either females of any age or males in secondary schools. These findings are limited to the specific geographic area in which the research was undertaken, and are not generalisable.

Gallagher (2000) conducted research into child sexual abuse undertaken by staff within residential institutions (which included schools) through drawing upon child protection records in eight broadly representative areas in England and Wales. It was found that most of these victims were older than all other victims of child abuse, owing to the minimum age that residential schools have for accepting children.



## 5 Factors that influence the incidence and response to child sexual abuse in schools

The culture of a school can be an important factor that influences the incidence and response to child sexual abuse perpetrated by school staff and peers. A strong, hierarchical and masculine culture has been noted as a feature of institutions where abuse is likely to occur (Erooga, 2012; Poynting and Donaldson, 2005; Colton, 2002; Utting, 1997; Brannan et al, 1992). A paper exploring group bullying, including serious sexual assault, at an elite Australian boarding school revealed that this type of behaviour was endemic in such schools where a female presence is minimal, and a culture of 'ruling class masculinity' encouraged boys to be tough, repress their emotions, and compete with and dominate each other (Poynting and Donaldson, 2005).

Gender-stereotyped norms often underpin abusive behaviour, and contribute to the formation of school cultures that are conducive to peer on peer abuse (Firmin, 2018a). A study undertaken by Firmin in the UK examined nine police case files into peer on peer abuse perpetrated between 2007 and 2012, with the sample covering young men and young women 'suspects and complainants' of peer abuse aged between 10 and 17 years. Only cases of peer on peer abuse that included murder or rape were examined, meaning that the full spectrum of what constitutes peer on peer abuse was not considered. Although information was not provided on the types of schools covered by the research, the study identified that '*at least 75% of young people in the [case] files were attending schools where stereotypical gender ideals were reinforced by the behaviour and attitudes of staff and/or students*' (Firmin, 2015, p.189). This study, however, drew only upon the cases selected from one police force, which limits the ability to generalise the results.

This culture also extends to the willingness of the school to address the environment that may foster sexual abuse. The previously mentioned study also identified that despite harmful gendered behaviours being associated with abusive incidences in eight cases, there existed only one example of a school attempting to change the school culture following the abusive incident (Firmin, 2015).

The impact of a school's culture on addressing issues of sexual abuse was also identified in research undertaken by GirlGuiding (2014) of over 1,200 girls and young women aged between 7 and 12 from across the UK. The study found that 61% of 11-16-year-old girls commented that teachers and staff either 'sometimes or always' dismiss sexual harassment as 'banter' or 'messaging around'. Information was not provided on the sampling approach employed, which limits the generalisability of the results.

The potentially heightened risk of peer on peer sexual abuse in schools with a significant gender imbalance was recognised in a 2015 serious case review into Stanbridge Earls residential special school, and is also covered in the *Keeping Children Safe in Education* guidance (Harrington and Whyte, 2015).

Studies have also identified that a large power imbalance between children and staff, as well as the implementation of strict behavioural codes, which make children overly compliant, can increase the risk of abuse from school staff (Algood et al, 2011; White et al, 2003). Power balances between staff can also make reporting abuse to third parties more difficult. Staff who report their superiors might fear that their report will be rebuffed, and that if the accused individual remains in power, they will be punished by the accused (Green, 2001). Those who report such abuse might also feel that they will be abandoned by the school should they undertake such reporting.

A qualitative study on 'sexting' in two inner-city London schools illustrated a lack of confidence in the schools' likely response, with one of the female respondents interviewed describing a 'culture of silence' around sexual harassment in schools. As noted in the research itself, the project was '*small in scale and exploratory in nature, and also culturally and geographically specific*' (Ringrose et al, 2011, p.6).

In the research described previously, relating to abuse at an elite Australian boarding school, the reaction by the school and parents to the incidents highlighted the culture and attitudes towards sexual

abuse; downplaying the sexual violence and instead describing it as bullying (Poynting and Donaldson, 2005). Other literature identifies social views of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) as a contributory feature that creates an environment that may limit the disclosure of child sexual abuse, notably abuse which is carried out by other males.

Furthermore, in residential schools, research has indicated that there can be an acceptance of such behaviour and deliberate overlooking by staff members of the abuse. Some of these staff may have been subject to a similar educational system and experience (Schaverien, 2004). In several of the cases of child sexual abuse in boarding schools perpetrated by school staff reported to Childline, it appeared that the teacher's behaviour was well known, and essentially allowed (Childline, 1997). The importance of an open and supportive, as opposed to closed and hierarchical, organisational culture has therefore been emphasised as a way of preventing child sexual abuse and improving reporting in institutions (CEOP, 2013; Munro and Fish, 2015).

The frequent inability of schools to identify instances of abuse (both peer on peer and abuse by school staff) in the absence of a disclosure, making them reliant on such disclosure as a means to identify abuse, can result in failure to prevent or address such incidences (Children's Commissioner for England, 2017).

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017b) identified that the following factors can all increase the chances of child sexual abuse within institutions:

- a lack of understanding or awareness of child abuse;
- a failure to listen to children;
- a failure to educate children about healthy and appropriate sexual development;
- a prioritisation of an institution's reputation over child protection;
- the normalisation of harmful practices; and
- a failure to see such abuse as a shared responsibility.



## 6 Unsuccessful safeguarding measures and positive approaches



## 6.1 Examples of where existing safeguarding measures have been unsuccessful

The safeguarding practices of schools in preventing and responding to incidents of child sexual abuse by school staff and peer on peer abuse have been criticised. This section draws on research, serious case reviews, government reviews and other sources to outline areas of safeguarding challenges or specific failures in safeguarding that have been documented (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1:** Examples of areas where safeguarding within schools can be unsuccessful

Understanding child sexual abuse	Reporting and acting upon child sexual abuse	Compliance	Working effectively with parents and other agencies
<p>The ability of school staff to distinguish between normal sexual experimentation and sexually harmful behaviour or sexual harassment and abuse</p> <p>Failures to identify cases, or suspected cases, of child sexual abuse and report them</p>	<p>Underestimating the importance of safeguarding and processes for reporting issues</p> <p>Lack of knowledge and confidence to address incidences of sexual abuse</p>	<p>Failures to follow national policy and guidance</p> <p>Failures in educating students about abuse</p> <p>Poor standards in the teaching of sex and relationship lessons</p>	<p>Inconsistent reporting of abuse or suspected abuse to external bodies and parties</p> <p>Lack of engagement with local authorities and safeguarding boards</p> <p>Schools can become isolated and closed from the rest of society</p> <p>Failures in seeking assistance and support from external bodies</p>

Sources: DfE, 2018a; Gov.Wales, 2018; Children's Commissioner for England, 2017; Coram, 2017; Lenehan and Geraghty, 2017; Parliament. uk, 2016c; Walters, 2016; Wonnacott and Carmi, 2016; Firmin, 2015; Harrington and Whyte, 2015; Briggs, 2014; Timmerman and Schreuder, 2014; Ofsted, 2013; Charmaraman et al, 2012; McKenna et al, 2012; Stead, 2012; Ofsted, 2011; Brown, 2010; Fyson, 2009; Singleton, 2009; Hackett and Taylor, 2008; Paul and Cawson, 2002; Paul et al, 2004; Utting, 1997.

### 6.1.1 Challenges in understanding child sexual abuse

In both mainstream and special residential schools, teachers and staff face difficulties in understanding the difference between 'developmentally normal' sexual behaviour and sexually harmful behaviour between children and young people (Briggs, 2014; Charmaraman et al, 2012; Brown, 2010; Hackett and Taylor, 2008; Paul et al, 2004). This is made more challenging by a lack of consensus about what constitutes such behaviours within the research literature. This may lead to failures in identifying and preventing peer on peer abuse.

The literature also highlights the importance of teachers being able to distinguish between normal sexual experimentation and sexually harmful behaviour or sexual harassment and abuse (Hackett and Taylor, 2008; Charmaraman et al, 2012). This is particularly the case for peer on peer abuse, which can often be misinterpreted as 'normal sexual experimentation', or in the case of male pupils committing the abuse 'boys being boys' and representing a normal part of male sexuality (Timmerman and Schreuder, 2014).

In relation to special residential schools, the specific needs of disabled children and young people, and societal attitudes towards the sexuality of people with disabilities, make it more challenging for professionals to balance the protection of children and young people from harm, whilst respecting their sexual development and autonomy (Brown, 2010). A 2004 study of residential special schools found that there was variability between schools in their policies and guidance on dealing with sexuality (Paul et al,



2004). This was confirmed by a 2011 study that found that only 19% of the 26 schools that participated had specific written policies on dealing with inappropriate sexual behaviour or abuse (Fyson, 2009).

A US study, involving focus groups undertaken with 32 members of school staff in four midwestern non-residential public (state or comprehensive school English and Welsh equivalent) middle schools, highlighted that teachers may face challenges or are not confident in distinguishing bullying from sexual harassment. The paper also noted that many teachers had received little training specifically on sexual harassment (Charmaraman et al, 2012).

A 2016 serious case review into the abuse perpetrated by William Vahey, a teacher at Southbank International School London who sexually abused at least 54 pupils over a four-year period, identified that opportunities to identify the risks posed by Vahey were missed. This was due to a lack of understanding amongst the school's staff as to how sex offenders operate, which led to indicators of concern going unrecognised and unreported. The review also noted that this was due to a lack of staff training, staff being unsure that fellow staff members held similar concerns, and staff being reluctant to report their concerns without substantial evidence to back up their claims (Wonnacott and Carmi, 2016).

### 6.1.2 Failure to report and act upon child sexual abuse

The Lenehan Review into residential special schools illustrated that although many such schools understand the importance of safeguarding, some institutions indicated confusion over how issues should be reported to the local safeguarding children boards. Additionally, confusion was identified over whether they should make children's social care referrals to the child's home local authority or the local safeguarding children board (Lenehan and Geraghty, 2017).

In relation to safeguarding, the previously mentioned paper by Firmin, which drew upon in-depth case analysis of various schools, revealed that in some cases, despite school professionals being fully aware of instances of abuse having been perpetrated, they *'did not respond in a way that increased a sense of safety amongst students and prevented further abuse'* (Firmin, 2015, p.192).

Written evidence submitted to the Women and Equalities Committee by the International Centre Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking at the University of Bedfordshire illustrated that incidents of sexual abuse are often not taken seriously by school leaders, and that *'educators often lack the knowledge and confidence to deal with incidents of sexual violence'* (Parliament.uk, 2016c, p.16). Information was, however, not provided on which type of school this refers to, or whether the perpetrator of the abuse was a member of the school staff or a peer.

### 6.1.3 Compliance failure

A 2016 serious case review into child sexual abuse perpetrated by two adult individuals at Kennet School, a non-residential academy secondary school in Thatcham, Berkshire, identified several missed opportunities to prevent the abuse. Professional guidance or national policy was not followed, and information on individuals that should have been shared in a proactive manner with other agencies in order to protect children, had not been shared (Walters, 2016).

Research into safeguarding in the workplace, including schools, has identified other instances of poor safeguarding practices that can create opportunities for abuse. At one secondary school, it was 12 months after a member of staff had been recruited that a CRB (now DBS) check was asked for, upon which it was found that the employee had previously engaged in sexual activity with a 14-year-old (McKenna et al, 2012). A 2013 serious case review into sexual abuse carried out by a teacher at a

primary school found that there had been a focus on learning and attainment instead of safeguarding (Stead, 2012).

An Ofsted report from 2011 also noted that safeguarding measures in 21% of schools (covering nursery schools, special schools, pupil referral units, primary and secondary schools) were only 'satisfactory' overall, with 2% of schools' safeguarding approaches being identified as 'inadequate' (Ofsted, 2011).

Some schools are also failing to provide the lessons that can help mitigate the risk of sexual abuse. A report by the Children's Commissioner for England (2017) into the role of schools in preventing child sexual abuse highlighted that around half of primary schools did not teach topics covering sexual abuse, with a sizeable minority of secondary schools reporting that they did not offer any teaching on sexual abuse. The research utilised focus groups with a variety of staff members from six schools and online surveys of 1,093 head teachers and teaching staff in England. Although the research sample was comprehensive, participation in the survey was voluntary and thus self-selecting, and it may not have been representative of all schools in England. Additionally, the nature of the specific form of abuse, be it school staff-related or peer on peer abuse, was not covered.

Ofsted inspections conducted in 2012 of 50 English primary, secondary and special schools found that sex and relationship education required improvement in over a third of schools. It concluded that this left children in these schools potentially vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviour and sexual exploitation (Ofsted, 2013).

#### 6.1.4 Failure to work effectively with parents and other agencies

The serious case review into Stanbridge Earls School, an independent residential special school, which closed in 2013 following concerns around non-consensual sexual activity between pupils, highlighted learning around policy, practice and culture (Harrington and Whyte, 2015). One of its findings was that the school had failed to keep parents properly informed about concerns involving their children. Other evidence indicates that there were inconsistencies in whether concerns were reported to parents (Paul and Cawson, 2002; Fyson, 2009). However, the cause of these inconsistencies may be due to the need for schools to make a judgement on whether sexual behaviour may have been caused by something that happened at home, which the parents themselves may have been involved in (Fyson, 2009). The serious case review concluded that the school had failed to make, and keep, other agencies aware of concerns about pupils (Harrington and Whyte, 2015).

These findings were mirrored in respect of mainstream boarding schools in a review carried out by the Independent Safeguarding Authority in 2009 ('The Singleton Review'), which found there was variability in engagement between local authorities and local safeguarding children boards and boarding schools (Singleton, 2009).

The 1997 Utting Review, which reviewed the adequacy of abuse safeguards for protecting children who live away from home (as a result of allegations of abuse in children's homes and foster care in North Wales), noted that residential special schools can easily become isolated, remote and closed, and not be seen as integral parts of the education provision within a local authority (Utting, 1997). Concerns around multi-agency working are echoed in a number of more recent studies, with some schools experiencing difficulties in accessing training from the local authority. Another study found that although over half of schools sought support from local authority social services in response to incidents at the school, only a third of schools had received it (Paul et al, 2004; Fyson, 2009).

Research has also revealed a lack of appropriate support for residential special schools in dealing with sexual behaviour. In the previously mentioned study, undertaken by Fyson (2007), it was shown that over half of the schools included in the research had sought assistance from social services regarding their pupils' sexual behaviour. Although school staff commended the individual social workers, they were *'often critical of the organisational response – which was typically geared towards launching child protection investigations and not towards offering advice or support'* (Fyson, 2007, p.7).

Schools have also expressed concerns over the support they receive for teaching sex and relationship education as a means in which to address sexual abuse. A report by Coram (2017) on sex and relationship education, which drew upon evidence obtained through a national survey of 85 schools leaders and 3 school-based focus groups, revealed that around two-thirds of schools stated that they required additional guidance on statutory sex and relationship education requirements. More than one-third of schools stated that they required additional support in teaching sex and relationship education. Such concerns are made all the more pressing following the UK Government's decision that all maintained secondary schools in England must teach sex and relationship education by 2019 (DfE, 2018b), and relationships and sexuality education in Wales by 2022 (Gov.Wales, 2018). Information was not provided on the breakdown or type of schools included in the Coram research.

## 6.2 Examples of positive approaches

There are many positive examples of schools seeking to address and mitigate the causes of child sexual abuse perpetrated by school staff and through peer on peer abuse (Table 6.2).

**Table 6.2:** Examples of positive approaches when addressing and mitigating the causes of child sexual abuse in schools

Increasing pupil and teacher understanding of child sexual abuse	Creating 'openness' within schools	Teaching Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons	Working effectively with parents and other agencies
<p>Implementation of a consistent approach towards teaching about relationships and staying safe</p> <p>Effective training of teachers early on in their careers</p>	<p>The creation of protective spaces where support is offered</p> <p>Creating a culture of openness within a school</p> <p>School as a sanctuary for child victims and survivors of abuse</p> <p>Promotion of disclosure of abuse through open discussions and the provision of information on staying safe</p>	<p>The teaching of effective and high-quality PSHE lessons in school</p> <p>A school's statutory safeguarding approach can assist school staff in the identification and addressing of abuse outside the school environment</p>	<p>The benefits of 'whole school' approaches</p> <p>Cooperation of multi-agency partnerships</p> <p>'Open-door' policies towards parents</p>

Sources: DfE, 2018a; Firmin, 2018b; McNeish et al, 2018; Children's Commissioner for England, 2017; Firmin et al, 2016; Kaufman and Erooga, 2016; Warrington et al, 2016; Children's Commissioner for England, 2015; Leclerc et al, 2015; Smith et al, 2015; Children's Commissioner for England, 2014; Ofsted, 2011; Clarke and Healey, 2006; Paul and Cawson, 2002.



### 6.2.1 Increasing pupil and teacher understanding of child sexual abuse

Research carried out by the Children's Commissioner for England illustrated that a consistent approach to teaching lessons on relationships and staying safe through primary and secondary school is beneficial to students, because it reinforces key approaches towards pupil safety and facilitates the adoption of a vigilant outlook by school staff as a whole (Children's Commissioner for England, 2017).

A literature review on the risk profiles for institutional child sexual abuse illustrated that most researchers agree that the education and training of the staff who work with children is a fundamental approach towards preventing child sexual abuse (Kaufman and Erooga, 2016). A survey of 204 pre-service teachers at the University of Western Sydney, focusing upon the respondents' knowledge and perception of child protection legislation, revealed that the teaching of child protection training is most effectively delivered to teachers while they are attending university (Clarke and Healey, 2006). It is important to note that the study was undertaken in one university, and covers only the child protection legislation of New South Wales. Hence, caution should be employed when generalising the findings to other contexts. It should be noted that the quality of the child protection courses themselves also plays a key role in the effectiveness of child protection, irrespective of when it is taught.

### 6.2.2 Creating 'openness' within schools

Between 2013 and 2016, the MsUnderstood Partnership sought to audit six sites across England through the use of observations, focus groups and reviews of operational documentation to assess each area's response to peer on peer abuse. It revealed that some schools have successfully created 'protective spaces' where young people were '*supported to build healthy and safe friendships with peers and partners*' (Firmin et al, 2016, p.24), enabling them to foster a school culture that prevents abuse.

Ofsted's 2011 report on best practice in schools notes, in respect of child protection, that the best schools have '*successfully established a culture of openness and transparency which encourages vigilance and a sense of shared responsibility for the protection of children and young people*' (Ofsted, 2011, p.2).

A survey of nearly 400 survivors of child sexual abuse in the UK indicated that teachers, being in positions outside of the family and peer groups as well as representing a trusted adult, are the most likely to receive sexual abuse disclosures. The sample was based upon recruiting respondents through sexual abuse support organisations. Consequently, the sample may over-represent survivors who had accessed support services and under-represent those who have not accessed services (Smith et al, 2015).

Warrington et al (2016) conducted 53 qualitative interviews with children and young adults aged 6–19 years who were in receipt of support due to their experiences of sexual abuse within the home. They revealed that schools can act as a sanctuary for the child, provided suitable support is given by the school.

Research in residential special schools for children has also highlighted good practice. One study found that staff were vigilant about reporting abuse and found good practice in communicating with children and therefore enabling disclosure or identification of abuse (Paul and Cawson, 2002).

Canadian research with a small sample of males who had committed sexual offences against children in work or volunteering activities within institutions (including, but not limited to, schools) provided information on what teachers could do to help prevent child sexual abuse in schools. Suggestions included schools having discussions to promote disclosure of possible abuse, advertising (within the schools) about being safe, and the teaching of sex education (Leclerc et al, 2015).

### 6.2.3 Teaching PSHE

Findings reported by the Children's Commissioner for England, based on the analysis of comments made in a focus group involving teachers, revealed that PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) lessons were regularly mentioned as an important approach towards preventing sexual abuse insofar as assisting children to recognise and disclose abuse (Children's Commissioner for England, 2017). This approach is particularly beneficial to adopt given that the identification of child sexual abuse is frequently dependent upon the child initiating the disclosure (Children's Commissioner for England, 2015). However, regression analysis (within the same report) revealed no statistically significant relationship between whether schools offered PSHE lessons and the successful mitigation or handling of sexual abuse cases. The report suggested the differing results could be due to the focus group being based on a small sample, or that only high-quality PSHE lessons or certain approaches to delivering this teaching are effective at assisting pupils in disclosing abuse (Children's Commissioner for England, 2017).

The research also suggested that schools' statutory duty to protect children from abuse and the safeguarding measures implemented within these institutions can also help staff members to identify and address possible cases of abuse outside the school context (Children's Commissioner for England, 2017).

### 6.2.4 Working effectively with parents and other agencies

Recent guidance offered by the DfE suggests that 'whole school or college' approaches towards safeguarding and child protection that involve the governing body or proprietor, all the staff, children, adult students, and parents and carers are the most effective (DfE, 2018a; McNeish et al, 2018).

The previously mentioned research by Firmin, consisting of in-depth analysis of nine cases of peer on peer abuse, also found that effective responses to peer on peer abuse require the cooperation of multi-agency partnerships in order to identify, assess and intervene with the harmful behaviour that enables this form of abuse (Firmin, 2018b).

Additionally, research undertaken by the UCL Institute of Education for the Children's Commissioner for England, and using a variety of data collection methods, sought to understand the views and experiences of 83 children who board in 17 residential special schools in England. The study found that most children felt safe in these institutions, and that staff treated children with dignity in most cases. As part of this study, researchers also spoke with the parents of these children, and found that they were positive about the schools' open-door policy towards parents (Children's Commissioner for England, 2014).



## 7 Gaps, limitations and caveats of existing research

There is limited evidence on child sexual abuse in residential schools in England and Wales.

- **The literature on child sexual abuse in schools and the role of schools in safeguarding children from abuse focuses primarily on non-residential schools.** There is a lack of research done in residential schools and exploring the specificities of the residential environment.
- **There is minimal survey or administrative data on child sexual abuse in residential schools, or where it exists it differs from one institution to the other and is not collected centrally, making it difficult to establish a national picture of child sexual abuse in residential schools or track change over time.** Whilst some survey and administrative data exists on the scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse in non-residential schools, caution should be exercised when inferring from these findings to a residential school context.

With regards to the literature which is available, the following issues should be acknowledged:

- **Lack of robust methodologies.** Most research conducted on child sexual abuse in residential schools comprises one-off, non-representative studies and their findings cannot therefore be reliably generalised to the population. Other studies use existing data on reported cases, and therefore do not represent those cases which are not disclosed, thus under-reporting the true prevalence of child sexual abuse. Also the literature is often dated and does not reflect the changes in safeguarding policy and practice that have taken place over time.
- **Definitions of child sexual abuse and peer on peer sexual abuse vary between studies.** There is also a failure within some studies to distinguish between type of perpetrator and the institution in question. Studies are not necessarily comparable with each other and may not reflect the Inquiry's understanding of these concepts.
- **Some of the research comes from outside the UK.** In particular, much of the research on child sexual abuse in schools comes from the USA and Australia and therefore caution should be used when considering these findings in a UK, or English or Welsh, context.

To increase our understanding of safeguarding practices within schools, the Inquiry has commissioned a mixed methods research project to explore the role of residential schools (both residential special schools and mainstream schools) in England and Wales in safeguarding children from child sexual abuse. The research will also explore what constitutes good practice in the prevention, identification, reporting of and response to child sexual abuse in residential schools.





# Glossary

<b>Child sexual abuse</b>	<i>'Forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening'</i> (DfE, 2015d, p.93). The activity may involve <i>'physical contact, including abuse by penetration or non-penetrative acts (such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside 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 including via the internet. Child sexual abuse includes child sexual exploitation'</i> (IICSA, 2018, p.18).
<b>Child sexual exploitation</b>	<p>There is no single UK or global definition of child sexual exploitation and England and Wales both have different definitions within their policy frameworks. In England child sexual exploitation can be understood as <i>'A form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology'</i> (DfE, 2017, p.5).</p> <p>In Wales it can be understood as <i>'The coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, "protection" or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent'</i> (All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group, 2013, p.3).</p>
<b>Peer on peer abuse</b>	<i>'Children can abuse other children. This is generally referred to as peer on peer abuse and can take many forms. This can include (but is not limited to) bullying (including cyberbullying); sexual violence and sexual harassment; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexting and initiating/hazing type violence and rituals'</i> (DfE, 2018c, p.84).
<b>Residential school</b>	A state or independent school providing care, education and boarding accommodation for some or all of its students.
<b>Residential special school</b>	A school which is specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and which provides residential accommodation to any children.
<b>Sexting</b>	Whilst there is no clear definition of 'sexting', for the purposes of this document it will refer to: <i>'The production and/or sharing of sexual photos and videos of and by young people who are under the age of 18'</i> (UKCIS, 2016, p.1).
<b>Harmful sexual behaviour (England), and sexually harmful behaviour (Wales)</b>	<i>'Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult'</i> (NSPCC, 2016, p.12).



# Appendices

## ● Appendix 1: Search terms

The search terms used are provided in the below table:

Abuse	Grooming	Residential special school
Academy	Harmful sexual behaviour	Safeguarding
Boarding school	Legislation	School
Child protection	Peer abuse	Secondary school
Child sexual abuse	Peer on peer abuse	Sexting
Child sexual exploitation	Primary school	Sexually harmful behaviour
Comprehensive school	Private school	Special school
CSA	Public school	Teacher
CSE	Residential school	Teaching staff

## ● Appendix 2: Databases used

The databases used are provided in the below table:

Access to Research	Google Scholar	Web of Science
British Library catalogue search	NSPCC Library	
Google	University of London Senate House Library catalogue search	

## ● Appendix 3: Relevant standards for keeping children safe from child sexual abuse in schools

### Primary legislation (England and Wales)

All maintained schools have a statutory duty to promote the wellbeing of their pupils under Section 22(5) of the Education Act 2002.

Under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 all maintained schools and further education institutions have statutory duties to operate in a way that takes into account the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of their pupils or children receiving education at the institution.

Specifically for England, Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 requires governing bodies of maintained schools to make arrangements for ensuring that such functions are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school.

Under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 all schools including independent schools and further education institutions in Wales have statutory duties to operate in a way that takes into account the need to safeguard and promote child welfare. To comply with these statutory duties local authorities, schools and further education institutions must ensure that *'reasonable measures are taken to minimise risks of harm to children's welfare [and] appropriate actions are taken to address concerns about the welfare of*

*a child or children, working to agreed local policies and procedures in full partnership with other local agencies'* (Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, p.9).

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 applies to both England and Wales. In England it includes the establishment of a national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, aimed at identifying serious child protection cases, as well as providing for new arrangements as to how local authorities and other agencies should work together to safeguard children. Under Section 34 of the Act, sex and relationship education is mandatory in England for all maintained secondary schools, and primary schools are free to teach it. All schools choosing to teach sex education must have regard to the guidance (Department for Education and Employment, 2000). The Department for Education (England) is making relationship education compulsory in all primary schools, relationship and sex education compulsory in all secondary schools and health education compulsory in all state-funded schools. Schools will be encouraged to teach these subjects from September 2019 and required to do so from September 2020. Draft regulations and accompanying guidance are currently available for public consultation (DfE, 2018b).

### Primary legislation (Wales)

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, introduced in April 2016, provides a statutory framework for Welsh social services and includes the strengthening of powers regarding the safeguarding of children. The Act also outlines the requirement that each professional and organisation is required to do all they can to ensure at-risk children are protected from abuse. The Act also created a statutory reporting duty, whereby 'relevant partners' of the local authority must inform the local authority if they have reasonable cause to suspect a child is at risk of abuse, neglect or other types of harm, known in Wales as a 'duty to report'.

### Secondary legislation (England and Wales)

The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 apply a duty to proprietors of independent schools (which in the case of academies and free schools is the academy trust) to ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

### Secondary legislation (England)

The School Staffing (England) Regulations 2009, The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and The Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) Regulations 2015 specify that, when recruiting staff, all schools in England must carry out a range of safer recruitment checks that allow the school, as the employer, to help determine an applicant's suitability for the role on offer. A school must not employ a person to work in regulated activity with children if they are barred from doing so by the Disclosure and Barring Service.

The Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) Regulations 2015 oblige non-maintained special schools to comply with certain requirements as a condition of their approval and whilst approved by the Secretary of State. One condition of approval is that the proprietor must make arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the health, safety and welfare of pupils, which have regard to any guidance including, where appropriate, the *National Minimum Standards*, about safeguarding and promoting the health, safety and welfare of pupils and, in the case of schools already approved, that these arrangements at the school with respect to these matters are in accordance with the approval given by the Secretary of State. For non-maintained special schools and independent schools, the definition of



'children' applies to the statutory responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, that is those under 18.

### Secondary legislation (Wales)

*Keeping Learners Safe* provides guidance for local authorities and governing bodies of maintained schools, further education institutions and independent schools in Wales on safeguarding and the promotion of child welfare (Welsh Government, 2015).

The *All-Wales National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation* sets out the minimum standards for safeguarding children boards and partner agencies. The plan covers such aspects as the prevention of child sexual exploitation, the protection of children from sexual exploitation and the provision of support to those who are subjected to or are at risk from sexual exploitation, and also assists in the identification and prosecution of perpetrators (Welsh Government, 2016).

In Wales, Relationships and Sexuality Education replaces Sex and Relationship Education from 2022. It will become statutory for all pupils aged 5–16 years (although age-appropriate topics will be taken into account) and will cover such issues as consent, relationships with friends and family, and how to stay safe (Gov.Wales, 2018). The change in name will be actioned as part of a refresh to guidance for the current curriculum.

### Statutory guidance (England and Wales)

*Working Together to Safeguard Children* sets out statutory guidance on the arrangements that organisations (including schools) should have in place to reflect the importance of the safeguarding and welfare of children, and of promoting it. Updates made in July 2018 have focused upon protecting children at risk of abuse or neglect through improving partnerships between police, councils and health services, as well as new legal requirements for the three safeguarding partners (senior police, council and health leaders) to make joint safeguarding decisions to meet the needs of local children and families. Further updates make reference to 'extra-familial threats' that children might experience at school in relation to abuse or exploitation from outside the family context. Guidance is also provided on the safeguarding responsibilities for organisations who work with children, and covers the new arrangements for inter-agency working through the introduction of three local safeguarding partners.

Additionally, non-statutory guidance is also provided on child protection from sexual exploitation (GOV. UK, 2018b). This guidance is neither mandatory nor regulated.

### Statutory guidance (England)

Specifically for England, schools must have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. This includes *Keeping Children Safe in Education* 2018, the statutory guidance on safeguarding for all schools in England (DfE, 2018c). It sets out the legal obligations and duties that schools and colleges must abide by to ensure the safety of children. Advice on peer on peer abuse was included in 2016, with the recently revised statutory guidance stating that '*governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse and sets out how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with*' (DfE, 2016, p.24). The 2018 version also now includes a new part 5 that sets out how schools should manage reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment and how to support victims.



In respect of residential schools, the guidance notes that such schools should be particularly alert to children's safeguarding, pupil relationships and the potential for peer on peer abuse, particularly in schools with a significant gender imbalance. Schools must have a designated safeguarding lead who must undergo child protection training every two years (DfE, 2016). The 2018 guidance provides advice on children with special educational needs and disabilities (DfE, 2018c). The advice also sets out some of the additional barriers that can exist when recognising abuse and neglect in this group of children.

### Non-statutory guidance and professional codes of practice (England and Wales)

*Teachers' Standards* 2011 define the minimum level of practice expected of trainees and teachers from the point of being awarded qualified teacher status (QTS). They are used to assess all trainees working towards QTS, and all those completing their statutory induction period. The standards are also used to assess the performance of all teachers with QTS who work in maintained schools, that is those subject to *The Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) (England) Regulations 2012*, and may additionally be used to assess the performance of teachers who hold qualified teacher learning and skills (QTLS) status (DfE, 2011). These standards also state that teachers, including head teachers, should safeguard children's wellbeing and maintain public trust in the teaching profession as part of their professional duties (DfE, 2011).

*The Boarding Schools: National Minimum Standards* and *Residential Special Schools: National Minimum Standards* (for England), and the *National Minimum Standards for Mainstream Boarding Schools*, and the *National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools* (for Wales) set out the standards that boarding schools and residential special schools in each country are expected to meet (and will be inspected against) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (DfE, 2015a; DfE, 2015b; Welsh Assembly Government, 2003a; Welsh Assembly Government, 2003b).

*Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children in Schools and Colleges* provides specific information and guidance regarding peer on peer abuse and in particular sexual violence and sexual harassment. The document provides information and advice on how to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse occurring, as well as what to do when it does occur, or is alleged to have occurred. Best practice approaches are also covered (DfE, 2018a).

*What to Do if You're Worried a Child is Being Abused: Advice for Practitioners* provides non-statutory advice for practitioners in order to help identify child abuse and neglect, as well information on the appropriate actions to take in response to its identification. Specifically for schools, the guidance provides information for school staff (both teaching and non-teaching) on how to address abuse and neglect, and how concerns should be reported (DfE, 2015c).

### Non-statutory guidance and professional codes of practice (England)

In England, residential schools which accommodate any children for more than 295 days per year are required to register as children's homes with Ofsted (as of March 2018, 225 residential special schools were registered as such) (GOV.UK, 2018c) and comply with the relevant legislation for children's homes rather than the *National Minimum Standards* (DfE, 2015a).

### Non-statutory guidance and professional codes of practice (Wales)

In Wales, if a residential school is providing accommodation for more than 295 days in a year it will be regulated and inspected as a care home service by Care Inspectorate Wales under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016.



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