

SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL POLICY



POLICY NAME: Sexual Exploitation and Grooming Policy

NEXT REVIEW DATE: 01/09/2026

Springfield School

Sexual Exploitation and Grooming Policy

Introduction:

This policy has been developed in response to growing concerns about the scale of sexual exploitation and the recognition that any child might be targeted for grooming and exploitation.

Policy aims:

The aims of this policy are to:

- demonstrate Springfield School's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils
- raise awareness about sexual exploitation and grooming
- help staff to identify warning signs and vulnerable children
- explain the school's procedures to be followed if sexual exploitation and grooming are suspected
- stress the importance of multi-agency cooperation.

Application:

This policy should be followed by all staff, volunteers and governors.

Definitions:

Sexual exploitation is a form of abuse whereby children are deliberately persuaded to enter into situations where they receive something (for example, gifts, money, food, accommodation) in exchange for sexual activity.

Grooming is the process of 'preparing' a boy or girl for a sexual purpose. Grooming is often slow and subtle, continuing for several weeks or months and lulling the child into a false sense of security. It always involves manipulation and deceit.

Two types of grooming are recognised: street grooming which occurs in the community, and online grooming using technology including the internet and mobile phones.

(Note: references to children, young people or pupils mean all individuals under the age of 18. References to parents mean parents, carers and others with parental responsibility.)

The complexity and challenge of sexual exploitation and grooming:

It can be difficult to identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation. The grooming process draws children into what they initially perceive as a new and caring relationship with an exciting older boyfriend or girlfriend. Attempts to explain the risks to the child may be met with derision and hostility. By the time the child realises the reality of the 'relationship' they may have been seriously sexually and physically abused, threatened with the distribution of indecent photographs or videos of their abuse and warned that they will put themselves or their family in danger if they speak out. Unsurprisingly, the child will be reticent to disclose their abuse, particularly to people in positions of authority such as teachers, social workers or police officers. The child may find it impossible, for several reasons, to speak to their

parent and their abusers will have sought to isolate them from their family and friends. Some children may have developed drug or alcohol addictions and rely on their abusers for supply. A fundamental learning point to emerge from cases of sexual exploitation such as those in Derby, Rochdale and Oxford and the Jimmy Saville case is that many children who try to disclose their abuse are not believed, or value judgements are made by professionals about the young person, suggesting they are 'willing partners' in a lifestyle they have 'chosen'. Remarkably, some young people's concerns and disclosures have been dismissed as groundless because of their challenging behaviour, involvement in crime or history of going missing from home, school or care.

As a school we have a responsibility to do all we can to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and grooming and to identify and support any pupil who is at risk of abuse.

School Action:

School staff are the only professionals in daily direct contact with children and we play an important role in keeping pupils safe and supporting them when things go wrong. To help keep our pupils safe from sexual exploitation and grooming we will:

Promote healthy and safe relationships

Raise pupils' awareness of sexual exploitation and grooming at an age-appropriate level

Raise staff awareness of sexual exploitation and grooming

Help parents and carers to understand the issues

Contribute to multi-agency safeguarding and child protection arrangements

Sexually active young people:

In law, a child is a person under the age of 18. Not all sexual activity involving a child is criminal, nor is it always abusive. The law is very clear on certain aspects of sexual activity, but schools and other agencies are expected to use professional judgement to determine whether a concern about sexual activity involving a child over the age of 13 is exploitative or abusive and should be referred to children's social care or the police.

The age of consent:

The age of consent to sexual activity throughout the UK is 16. The age of consent to homosexual activity is now 16. Heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual children are all able to consent once they reach 16. Children of this age, although above the age of consent, may be victims of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or rape.

Sexual activity involving a child under 13 is always a criminal offence and school will always refer such concerns to children's social care.

School staff should report any concern about under-age sexual activity to the DSL, who will decide on the most appropriate course of action. The school will follow the DSCB guidance on dealing with under-age sexual activity.

School staff who are approached by a pupil wishing to discuss sexual matters must make it clear to the pupil that they cannot guarantee confidentiality but will act in the child's best interests.

The Legal Framework:

Sections 175 and 157 of The Education Act 2002 require the governing bodies of all schools and colleges and the proprietors of independent schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. The statutory child protection guidance for schools is 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (Sept 2024). This guidance explains that:

‘Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone’s responsibility. ‘Children’ includes everyone under the age of 18. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.

If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- *Providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge*
- *protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online*
- *preventing the impairment of children’s mental and physical health or development*
- *ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care*
- *taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes’.*

The multi-agency child protection guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (December 2023) emphasises that:

‘Successful outcomes for children depend on strong partnership working between parents/carers and the practitioners working with them. Practitioners should take a child-centred approach to meeting the needs of the whole family.

A child-centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. All practitioners should follow the principles of the Children Acts 1989 and 2004’.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 covers sexual offences against children, including offences involving grooming and the internet and trafficking.

Warning Signs:

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse and the range of indicators of sexual abuse can be found in the school’s child protection policy.

Procedures to be followed when sexual exploitation or grooming are known or suspected:

Early identification of risk is known to be a crucial factor in reducing harm so the vigilance of school staff is critically important. Staff should not attempt to manage concerns about sexual exploitation or grooming in isolation. The DSL must always be informed and school leadership will enlist the advice and support of children’s social care and the police as appropriate.

Referring Cases

Where child sexual exploitation, or the risk of it, is suspected, frontline practitioners should discuss the case with Cheshire East Consultation Service on Tel: 0300 123 5012 - Option 2 (8.30 am to 5.00

pm) or Out of Hours Tel: 0300 123 5022, Use the Pan Cheshire Risk Assessment tool (see LSCB CSE web page).

Reviewed:	Annually
Lead Person:	Safeguarding Leads