

Beyond Referrals:

Addressing Harmful Sexual Behaviours in Schools

A SELF-ASSESSMENT RESOURCE FOR MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

Carlene Firmin, Jenny Lloyd, Pat Branigan and Joanne Walker



THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION,
VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING

Guidance written in partnership with

NSPCC

BACKGROUND

In 2013, a report was published following the joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation into the effectiveness of multi-agency work with children and young people in England and Wales who had committed sexual offences and were supervised in the community (CJJI, 2013). The Joint Inspectors report, recommended LSCBs take action to monitor 'the effectiveness of the multi-agency response to such children and young people in their area, particularly including the identification of such cases, joint assessments and the interventions to them and their families and, where appropriate, their victims'.

Good multi-agency policies demonstrate commitment to a partnership approach and a common philosophy that outlines what is expected of workers and other professionals. They guide actions, clarify individual roles and responsibilities, and provide a benchmark for good practice. This shared ownership is crucial for this group of children, young people and their families: they often have complex needs that can't be addressed by a single agency and, as such, require a consistent, combined response.

HSB in schools and the coordination of education response

Young people have told researchers, journalists and professionals about their experiences of harmful sexual behaviours while at school.

There is some boys in the school that like keep asking me to have sex with them and I am just like "no," like on a daily basis...like they will walk around school and try dragging me into corners and feel me up and everything and it's just irritating because they don't understand.

(Barter, et al. 2009:110)

My abusers were the most popular boys in the school, they played on all the sports teams. The principal at the time tried to put it down to 'rugby locker-room banter' and didn't seem surprised at all" (a boy who was assaulted in a classroom by three of his friends aged 15)

(BBC, 2015)

Schools have requested further support and guidance from policymakers to develop their practice in this area (National Education Union and UK Feminista, 2017; Women and Equalities Committee, 2016) and in late 2017 the Government issued a national advice document on sexual violence and harassment in schools for the first time.

Schools are key partners in the prevention and response to HSB. In addition to supporting young people who may have displayed HSB in home and community settings, a parliamentary Inquiry into sexual harassment and violence within UK schools by the Women and Equalities Committee called for educationalists and partners to do more to safeguard young people from HSB in schools. Schools themselves have asked for further support in this regard and the Department for Education has issued new advice for schools to address this particular form of HSB within educational settings (Department for Education, 2018). Schools and colleges may be involved at many stages of the management of cases involving HSB – from prevention to early response – through referral into the multi-agency process and on to support for young people and their families. Without clear guidance and multi-agency support, schools struggle to establish thresholds to identify cases of HSB, and to refer these to key agencies, as well as how to manage and support all the individuals involved.

This resource is intended to support multi-agency partnerships identify their role in, and assess their contribution to, addressing harmful sexual behaviours in schools. It compliments a resource that has been designed for schools to consider their own practices in this regard (Firmin, Lloyd and Walker, 2018). It was designed following a study, '*Beyond Referrals*', to identify the multi-agency enablers and barriers of addressing HSB in schools, and is informed by the data that was collected during that study in addition to international research on the issue. For more information on the '*Beyond Referrals*' study please visit the project page on the Contextual Safeguarding website.

THE TOOL

The Levers of Practice tool can be used by multi-agency partnerships to assess the extent to which they currently enable effective responses to HSB in schools. It is designed to explore the extent to which local schools provide an environment in which HSB can be prevented and challenged, as well as consider the specific components required in response to incidents. When viewed together, this tool and that which has been designed for schools are intended to progress multi-agency practices beyond the ability of schools to refer concerns about HSB and focus on the extent to which a range of agencies create safety, and thereby challenge HSB and associated attitudes, in schools.

How to use the audit tool

This is a strength-based tool – its focuses on stating what partnerships do rather than what they don't do. Therefore, when completing it partnerships should consider the green column first. If they are unable to evidence that they meet the requirements of the green column partnerships should move across to the amber column and assess whether they meet these requirements. Should the partnership believe that they do not meet the requirements in either the green or amber column then they should mark themselves in the red column.

Scoring

Using the tool, partnerships can calculate their score against four different categories (see below) and within these, different levers. Points are allocated as follows: ■ Green – 2, ■ Amber – 1, ■ Red – 0. Working down each row, partnerships can allocate points per row and input these into the supporting spreadsheet. Once the total scores are calculated, partnerships will be able to map their progress visually on five separate radar charts.

Collecting evidence for the purposes of self-assessment

A range of evidence is required to complete the self-assessment. Some of this data will be readily available whereas other information may require additional collection. The methods used to gather evidence will vary between partnerships and agencies but could include:

- Case reviews – to understand the links between schools and the multi-agency partnership, thresholds, interventions and language used
- Observations of meetings – strategic and operational, related to cases of HSB such as CSE, VAWG, gangs panel, adolescent safeguarding, individual strategy meetings and education
- Engagement with multi-agency staff through small groups or interviews to develop a picture of the approach by agencies and practitioners to HSB
- Review of local policies and procedures relating to HSB
- Engagement with young people – within schools and those that have accessed, or are currently accessing, the provision of services relating to HSB on their experiences and perspectives.



The relationship between this tool and the NSPCC HSB Framework (developed in partnership with Research in Practice and University of Durham)

This resource has been designed for multi-agency partnerships to assess their own response to HSB in schools and the extent to which partnership working equips schools to work 'Beyond Referrals' into social care and develop effective responses to HSB. It is focused on approaches which are designed to create safe education environments, as well as supporting effective responses to individual incidents. It has been developed to complement and link with the NSPCC Harmful Sexual Behaviour framework and associated tools designed to support schools specifically with this practice in this area.

The NSPCC's HSB framework aims to encourage multi-agency approaches to working with these young people and their families in the most effective, non-judgemental way possible. The NSPCC audit, which accompanies the framework, is a practical tool that local areas can use at a systemic level to assess their current responses to HSB across the entire workforce (health, social care, education etc.) and come together to formulate a consistent and coherent way forward to address the concerns and needs of children and young people who display HSB.

When undertaking the NSPCC HSB framework audit, MA partnerships can use this Beyond Referrals resource to assess and record the educational sector's response to HSB and feed this into the wider workforce HSB framework audit.

SELF-ASSESSMENT CATEGORIES

There are four categories to the self-assessment tool:



SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES



PREVENTION



IDENTIFICATION



RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION

Each category represents a 'Lever' for preventing and addressing HSB within schools.

Each *Lever* is comprised of a number of Components against which a partnership can assess themselves. The remainder of this document explains each Lever and Component – with reference to practice examples and statements from young people and professionals. For further advice and support on conducting a local self-assessment of the contribution a partnership makes to addressing HSB in schools please contact visit www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk or contact joanne.walker@beds.ac.uk



SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

Systems and structures related to safeguarding, adolescent vulnerability, exploitation and sexual violence all informed the extent to which multi-agency safeguarding partnerships could contribute a response towards HSB in schools. There were seven components of this Lever identified during the *Beyond Referrals* study – and which feature on the relevant self-assessment table resource. They are as follows:

- 1 A clear referral pathway:** a pathway that is used by schools to refer/notify the safeguarding partnership about concerns related to HSB between students
- 2 Opportunities for education providers to be represented at multi-agency meetings:** attempts made to either streamline multi-agency meetings to ensure they were manageable for education partners or creating opportunities for education representatives to engage with multi-agency discussions about HSB in the local area
- 3 A panel process to monitor and discuss school exclusions or managed moves between schools:** often referred to as a Fair Access Panel – such a meeting between schools could be used to identify trends associated with HSB students, shared challenges about managing concerns and create opportunities to build partnership responses that create safer school spaces rather than move young people out of unsafe ones
- 4 The analytical capacity to identify trends related to HSB:** being able to analyse HSB referrals would mean that partnerships could proactively identify if a number of their HSB cases were associated to one school or a local community area nearby any of their schools – and use this as a means through which to work with schools to prevent escalation

- 5 Mechanisms to recognise different dynamics at play within local educational provisions:** associated to the above point, school-focused analysis across the partnership to identify which education facilities were holding the greatest known vulnerability associated with HSB such as gang-affiliation, familial abuse, missing, youth offending and so on would enable a partnership to monitor the success of school-based interventions and intelligently target offers of support
- 6 Opportunities for the partnership to have a presence in schools:** Where partner agencies were located, and delivered services in, schools they built an understanding of schools dynamics and could also be alert to any concerns that may require contextual attention. This would include health and social work provision in schools, safer schools officers and community sector organisations amongst others

Collectively these components of structures and systems offered mechanisms through which safeguarding partnerships and schools could proactively work together to identify concerns, refer such concerns where appropriate and create school communities where the risk of HSB was reduced:

There'll be some weeks here, [DSL name] starts to come into our morning briefings, probably in the last couple of months and she briefly tells us of students to watch out for... of what's happening, we've had children gone into care or girls who are particularly vulnerable, say for exploitation, to give us a heads up about who to really keep an eye out for and what to look out for, so on that front, while there may have been some slight shortcomings, it's certainly getting better.

(Staff focus group, Site D)



SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES



PREVENTION



IDENTIFICATION



RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION



PREVENTION

While schools are often at the forefront of sexual harm prevention, multi-agency partnerships can both contribute to, and enable, this approach.

I think outside of the school... obviously we do as much as we can in school, like our sex ed module and everything, but there is only a certain amount that we can do, out of school we don't have any control over that. I think within [site] anyway, having lived in different areas of [location] there's like a gang culture that's quite prevalent I think, and what can we do about that? Not that much...

(School focus group Site Y, staff)

The resource outlines four Components of this Lever for multi-agency partnerships:

- 1 Contribution to RSE content:** safeguarding partnership could provide content to school curriculum such as interactive resources or guidance for delivering HSB related sessions. Some may even commission external services to deliver preventative interventions within school
- 2 Support to respond to emerging concerns and trends through early intervention:** where partnerships are able to offer advice, and sometimes resource, to address emerging concerns (rather than only respond to crisis incidents) then an early intervention offer within a local authority can galvanise schools to be proactive and preventative

3 Promotion of effective responses as a means of prevention: where safeguarding partnerships have successfully intervened to de-escalate or respond to HSB incidents it is important that they are promoted to professionals, young people and parents. Such messaging can increase confidence in the ability of services to safeguard young people, send messages about behaviour that has been identified as harmful or inappropriate and, as such, contribute to prevention

4 Holistic approaches to violence prevention being adopted by a partnership: HSB can appear as another issue for schools to address alongside sexual exploitation, gang-affiliation, domestic abuse, and so on. Where local partnerships are attempting to deliver holistic approaches to violence prevention that draw together the common issues which underpin violence and/or are required to address its impact it can assist schools in addressing HSB alongside other safeguarding concerns

Taken together, these four Components of prevention within safeguarding partnerships provide school with resources to educate students, respond to emerging concerns and manage the demands on capacity that can come with having to proactively address HSB.



SYSTEMS AND
STRUCTURES



PREVENTION



IDENTIFICATION



RESPONSE AND
INTERVENTION



IDENTIFICATION

The ability of staff and students to identify harmful sexual behaviours that occur in schools is influenced by five contributions that can be made by professionals within a wider safeguarding partnership:

- 1 The provision of a cultural context in which professionals are equipped to recognise HSB as a safeguarding (rather than solely a policing or behavioural concern):** if schools are attempting to refer or flag concerns about HSB with safeguarding partners it is critical that these can be responded to. In the absence of a safeguarding response to HSB concerns school may manage them through their behavioural procedures and will be ill-equipped as single service to address underlying drivers of harmful behaviour
- 2 Consistent and appropriate use of language:** part of the ability of staff being able to see HSB as a safeguarding issue is consideration to how it is described. When staff in a partnership – who may be accepting HSB referrals from, or discussing cases with, schools – use language that recognises the safeguarding dynamics of HSB, the potential contextual influences and the vulnerability of those involved they enable schools to take a similar approach
- 3 The use of resources to assist in consistent and accurate understandings:** local partnerships may use a range of resources (assessment, identification and intervention resources) to identify and describe HSB. It is important that these are used consistently across services and shared with schools as a means of shaping language, attitudes and perspectives in regards to HSB and those involved

4 The use of a shared definition: Associated to the two points above, the use of a shared definition (often promoted through resources and monitored through the use of language) can assist in achieving a common approach between partners and schools in describing the situation they are seeking to address

5 The ability to identify and share contextual trends: safeguarding partnerships have access to a wealth of data that is beyond the reach of schools and may be able to put their experiences into context. As such it is important that they provide an account of contextual trends associated to HSB (in relation to peer group, school, community and online contexts) so that schools and other partners are able to identify concerns that may be related

Jointly, these five components of identification draw upon the knowledge and capacity within safeguarding partnerships to assist schools in the proactive and consistent identification of HSB. They create mechanisms for schools to develop practise that are aligned with wider partnerships through shared resources, language and knowledge.



SYSTEMS AND
STRUCTURES



PREVENTION



IDENTIFICATION



RESPONSE AND
INTERVENTION



RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION

Five Components of multi-agency practice was identified as leveraging effective responses and interventions following inappropriate, violent or abusive acts or trends of harmful sexual behaviour within schools:

- 1 Investment in universal and targeted services that could form part of a multi-agency intervention offer (involving health, youth service, children's services and others):** a range of services could be involved in the response to HSB incidents or trends in schools. The capacity of a partnership to address the multiple needs and experiences of those involved is an important consideration in deciding upon how best to respond
- 2 The communication of successful interventions and developments in responses following referrals from schools:** Staff and students in educational settings need to believe that professionals can offer an effective and protective response to HSB. It is therefore important that different mechanisms are identified for communicating to professionals and to young people and their parents where interventions have been successful and what this has meant for those involved. In the absence of such staff can believe that interventions are not possible or limited:

"I think outside of the school... obviously we do as much as we can in school, like our sex ed module and everything, but there is only a certain amount that we can do, out of school we don't have any control over that. I think within [site Z] anyway, having lived in different areas of [location] there's like a gang culture that's quite prevalent I think, and what can we do about that? Not that much, because it's not necessarily kids who are even our ex-pupils, they're kids who we have no idea who they are."

(Site Z, school staff)

- 3 Partnerships that build positive relationships with schools and proactively sought to understand and address any barriers to school engagement:** where partnerships are struggling to engage with certain schools it is important that they persist and utilise relationships, data and offers of support in attempts to break down barriers. An acceptance that some schools cannot be engaged creates risks for the young people who attend them.
- 4 Responses to trends, for example in when trends of escalation in community contexts were identified, may have prevented critical incidents:** As per the Components of identification, partnerships are in a stronger position than any individual school to identify community trends that may be impacting their students. Should these be identified it is important that they are both communicated to, and addressed with, the school in order to build confidence in the referral and response process and to demonstrate the ways that risks can be managed or reduced.
- 5 An understanding and application of thresholds for HSB referrals that were shared between all agencies in the partnership – including schools:** when schools raise concerns about HSB trends or incidents it is important that a continuum of behaviours can be addressed and that thresholds for statutory intervention are shared in advance so as to manage demand and ensure that the right referrals are made at the right time. In this regard partnerships may also benefit from hearing challenge from schools who may believe that the thresholds decisions do not adequately address the HSB risks that they are managing.

Taken together these five components of response and intervention within safeguarding partnerships create opportunities for social care, policing, health and other services to work alongside schools in response to HSB incidents and trends. They provide mechanisms for partnerships to demonstrate the ways in which they can safeguard young people and the contexts in which they have encountered harm and therefore build trusted relationships between professionals and services, as well as with young people.



SYSTEMS AND
STRUCTURES



PREVENTION



IDENTIFICATION



RESPONSE AND
INTERVENTION



THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION,
VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING

With thanks for our funders



The Samworth
Foundation