Policy Information Sheet

Name of Policy:	**Child on Child Abuse Policy**
Delegated Authority	☒ Trust Board ☐ Nominated Committee ☐ CEO ☐ CFO ☐Other _____
Policy review cycle	☒ Annual ☐ 3 years ☐ 4 years ☐ Other _____
Statutory policy	☐ Yes ☒ No
Published online	☐ Statutory ☒ Trust recommended ☐ No

Document Control			
Created by (author)		R.Kitson	
Date created		August 2026	
Approved by		Trust Board	
Date approved		06.10.2026	
Next Review Date		October 2027	
Recorded in minutes			
Document History			
Version	Author	Revisions	Final approval date
1.0	R.Kitson		06.10.2026

1. Statement of Intent

Hartlepool Free School is committed to providing a safe, respectful and nurturing environment in which every child feels valued, listened to and protected.

We recognise that children can abuse other children and that child-on-child abuse can occur inside or outside school, within the community and online.

At Hartlepool Free School, safety is paramount. Our Safe Students approach teaches pupils that everyone has a responsibility to help keep themselves and others safe. This includes making safe choices, communicating concerns, respecting other people's boundaries and telling a trusted adult when something does not feel right.

We recognise that behaviour is a form of communication and that our pupils may have additional needs relating to communication, cognition, social understanding, emotional regulation, trauma, attachment and mental health. These needs will inform how we understand and respond to behaviour, but they do not mean that abusive or harmful behaviour will be ignored or normalised.

There is a zero-tolerance approach to child-on-child abuse. Harmful behaviour will never be dismissed as banter, having a laugh, part of growing up, 'boys being boys', flirting or something a child should simply tolerate.

Zero tolerance does not mean that every incident will result in the same sanction. It means that every concern will be recognised, taken seriously and responded to appropriately.

Our response will always seek to:

- protect the child who has experienced harm;
- safeguard all other children;
- understand the behaviour and its context;
- support the child who has displayed harmful behaviour;
- reduce the likelihood of further harm; and
- help children develop safer behaviours and relationships.



2. Legal and Statutory Framework

This policy has regard to:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children;
- the Children Acts 1989 and 2004;
- the Education Act 2002;
- the Equality Act 2010;
- the Human Rights Act 1998;
- the Sexual Offences Act 2003;
- DfE Behaviour in Schools guidance;
- DfE guidance relating to searching, screening and confiscation; and
- relevant local safeguarding partnership procedures.

This policy should be read alongside the school's:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy;
- Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy;
- Preventing Bullying Policy;
- Online Safety / Acceptable Use arrangements;
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy;
- Holding Safely Policy; and
- SEND Policy.

Where behaviour may constitute abuse or a safeguarding concern, safeguarding procedures take priority over behaviour management procedures.

3. What is Child-on-Child Abuse?

Child-on-child abuse is abuse of one or more children by another child or group of children. It can occur between children of any age, sex or background and may happen face-to-face or online.

It may include, but is not limited to:

- bullying, including cyberbullying and prejudice-based or discriminatory bullying;
- physical abuse, such as hitting, kicking, biting or otherwise causing physical harm;
- abuse within intimate or personal relationships between children;
- sexual violence, sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour;
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent;
- consensual or non-consensual sharing of nude or semi-nude images;
- taking or distributing sexualised or manipulated images, including AI-generated or deepfake material;
- upskirting, sexualised bullying or comments;
- coercion, intimidation or controlling behaviour;
- initiation or hazing-type behaviour;
- child criminal exploitation or child sexual exploitation;
- coercing another child into criminal, sexual or harmful activity; and
- harmful behaviour through social media, messaging services, gaming platforms or other technology.

Child-on-child abuse may involve a single incident or a pattern of behaviour. Staff must also be alert to apparently lower-level behaviour which, when considered alongside other information, may indicate an emerging pattern of harm.

4. Vulnerability and SEND

Children with SEND and additional needs can experience additional barriers to recognising, reporting or communicating abuse. Staff will consider each child's:

- developmental age and communication needs;
- social understanding and sensory needs;
- emotional regulation, previous experiences and trauma;
- SEND and mental health;
- vulnerability to coercion or exploitation; and
- ability to understand consent, relationships and boundaries.

Staff must never assume that harmful behaviour is simply a feature of a child's SEND. Equally, responses must avoid unnecessarily criminalising or punishing behaviour where a child requires education, intervention or specialist support.

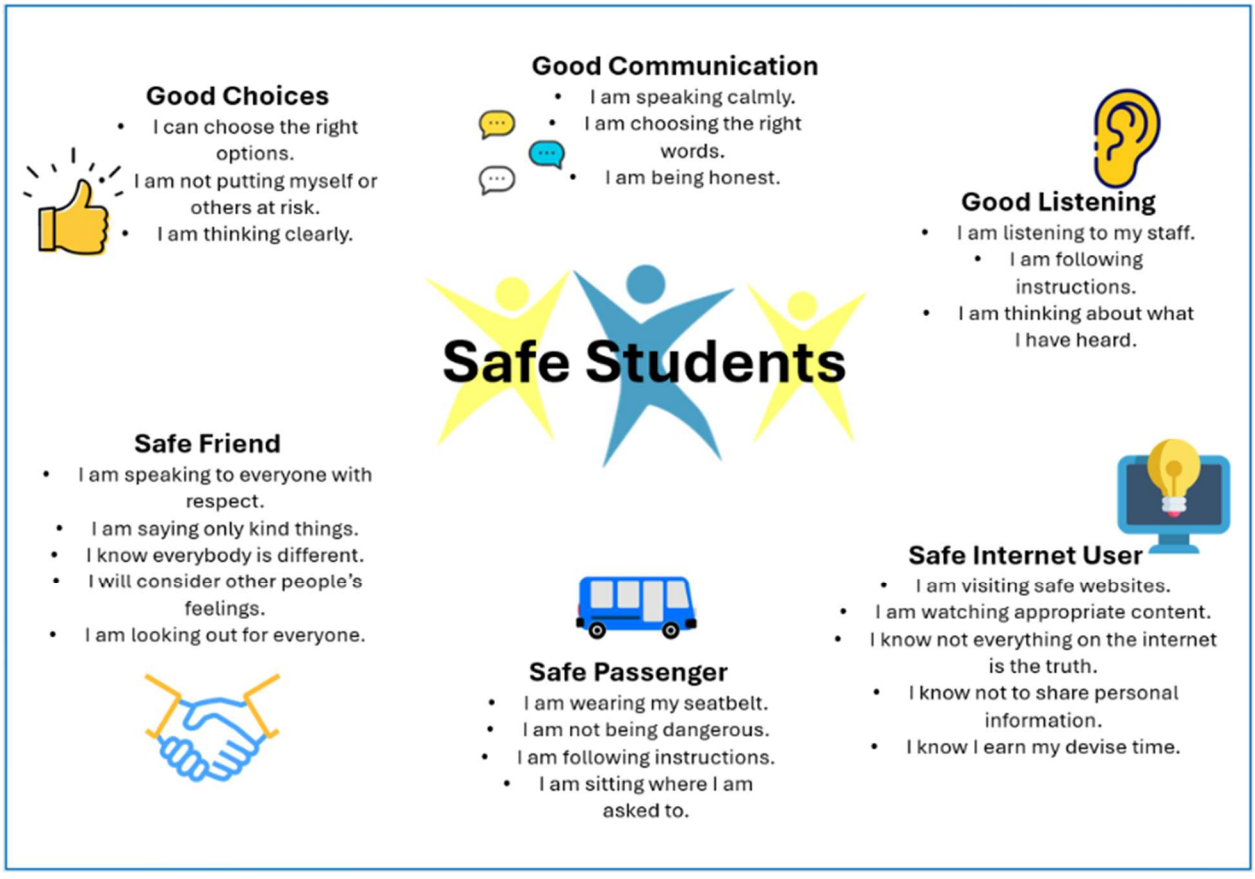
Our approach is safeguarding-led, child-centred, proportionate and individualised.

5. Prevention

Preventing child-on-child abuse is everyone's responsibility. Hartlepool Free School promotes prevention through:

- the Safe Students framework;
- PSHE, RSHE, Personal Development and safeguarding education;
- teaching about healthy relationships, consent, boundaries and online safety;
- explicit teaching of appropriate behaviour and how to seek help;
- Ready to Learn, Zones of Regulation, Thrive and PACE-informed relational approaches;
- CASS Plans and individualised support;
- staff modelling respectful relationships and challenging harmful or discriminatory language;
- appropriate supervision and risk assessment; and
- listening to pupil voice.

Staff will address inappropriate behaviour early wherever possible to prevent it becoming normalised or escalating into more serious harm.



6. Reporting a Concern

Children are encouraged to speak to any trusted member of staff if they are worried about themselves or another child. A child does not need to use safeguarding terminology or describe something as 'abuse' for staff to recognise that they may be describing a safeguarding concern.

All staff must:

1. listen carefully;
2. remain calm and non-judgemental;
3. take the child seriously;
4. reassure them that they have done the right thing by speaking;
5. not promise confidentiality;
6. avoid asking leading or unnecessary questions;
7. make an accurate factual record; and
8. report the concern to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a Deputy DSL without delay.

Where a child is at immediate risk, staff must act immediately to secure their safety. Concerns will be recorded through the school's safeguarding recording system in accordance with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

7. Responding to Child-on-Child Abuse

The DSL or Deputy DSL will consider each concern on a case-by-case basis. The response will consider:

- the wishes and feelings of the child who has experienced harm;
- the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour;
- the ages, developmental stages, SEND and communication needs of the children;
- any imbalance of power, coercion, intimidation or exploitation;
- whether the behaviour is isolated or part of a pattern and any previous concerns;
- the risk of further harm and the needs of witnesses or other affected children;
- whether a crime may have been committed; and
- whether Children's Social Care, police or another agency should be involved.

Possible responses include:

- managing the concern internally with safeguarding oversight;
- pastoral or therapeutic intervention and CASS Plan review;
- individual safety or risk-management plans and increased supervision;
- environmental or timetable adjustments;
- work with parents/carers where appropriate;
- Family Help or other early support;
- referral to Children's Social Care or the police;

- specialist harmful sexual behaviour assessment or intervention; and
- action under the Promoting Positive Behaviour or Suspension and Exclusion Policies.

Safeguarding action does not depend upon a criminal investigation or criminal conviction.

8. Supporting the Child Who Has Experienced Harm

The child's safety, wishes and wellbeing will remain central to decision-making. The school will:

- listen to and take the child seriously and ensure that they do not feel blamed;
- provide a trusted adult and appropriate pastoral or specialist support;
- consider adjustments to lessons, social times, transport or other arrangements;
- protect them from retaliation, bullying or further contact where necessary;
- involve parents/carers where appropriate and safe;
- regularly review arrangements; and
- minimise disruption to their education wherever possible.

A child who reports abuse should not be made to feel that they are creating a problem by reporting it.

9. Supporting the Child Who Has Displayed Harmful Behaviour

A child who has displayed harmful behaviour may also have significant safeguarding, SEND or therapeutic needs. Supporting that child does not reduce the seriousness of the harm experienced by another child.

The school will seek to understand what happened, what contributed to the behaviour, whether the child has themselves experienced abuse, exploitation or trauma, their understanding of boundaries and consent, and what needs to change to prevent further harm.

Support may include CASS Plan review, Thrive or therapeutic intervention, PACE-informed work, emotional regulation support, explicit teaching about relationships and boundaries, increased supervision, risk assessment, parental involvement, specialist agency support and appropriate behavioural consequences.

Consequences will be reasonable, proportionate and individualised, taking account of safeguarding information and the child's needs.

10. Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment and Harmful Sexual Behaviour

All reports of sexual violence, sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour will be taken seriously. The school will never normalise sexualised comments, unwanted touching, sexual jokes, sexualised bullying or inappropriate online behaviour.

Where sexual violence or serious sexual harassment is reported, the DSL will immediately consider safeguarding arrangements for all children involved, including whether children should

share classes, social spaces, activities or transport. Where appropriate, advice or referral will be sought from Children's Social Care and/or the police.

Staff must not attempt to investigate serious sexual offences themselves where doing so could compromise a statutory or police investigation.

11. Online Child-on-Child Abuse

Child-on-child abuse can happen wholly or partly online. This includes harassment, threats, bullying, sexualised messages, exploitation, coercion, unwanted explicit content and the creation or sharing of nude or semi-nude images.

This also includes AI-generated or digitally manipulated sexual images of children.

Staff must report these concerns immediately to the DSL and must not forward, copy, print or unnecessarily view sexual images of children.

Incidents occurring outside school will still be considered where they affect the safety, welfare or education of a pupil.

12. Behaviour, Consequences and Restorative Work

Child-on-child abuse is fundamentally a safeguarding issue. Behavioural consequences may also be appropriate, but these will form part of a wider safeguarding response.

Restorative work may be beneficial in some circumstances but will never be automatically required. A child who has experienced abuse will never be expected to meet, communicate with or take part in restorative work with another child simply to resolve an incident.

Any restorative intervention will only take place where it is assessed as safe, appropriate and beneficial.

13. Recording and Information Sharing

All concerns, discussions, actions, decisions and the reasons for those decisions will be recorded. Records will clearly distinguish between fact, professional observation, information provided by others and professional judgement.

Information will be shared with relevant agencies where necessary to safeguard children and in accordance with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

14. Roles and Responsibilities

Trust Board

The Trust Board will ensure that appropriate policies, procedures and safeguarding arrangements are in place to prevent and respond to child-on-child abuse.

Principal and Senior Leadership Team

Senior leaders will promote a culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, children feel able to report concerns, inappropriate behaviour is challenged, staff understand child-on-child abuse and policies are implemented consistently.

Designated Safeguarding Lead

The DSL will oversee safeguarding responses, coordinate referrals, ensure appropriate risk assessments and support plans are in place, liaise with parents/carers and external agencies, monitor patterns and recurring concerns, and ensure safeguarding records are maintained.

All Staff

All staff must recognise signs of child-on-child abuse, challenge harmful or inappropriate behaviour, listen to children, report concerns promptly, follow safeguarding procedures and maintain professional curiosity.

15. Monitoring and Review

The school will monitor child-on-child abuse concerns to identify:

- patterns of behaviour and repeat incidents;
- locations or times where concerns are more likely to arise;
- online trends and emerging safeguarding risks;
- discriminatory or prejudicial behaviour; and
- any groups of children who appear disproportionately affected.

Learning from incidents will be used to improve safeguarding education, staff practice, supervision, the physical environment and individual support.

This policy will be reviewed annually, following significant safeguarding incidents, or sooner where statutory guidance changes.

At Hartlepool Free School, being a Safe Student means helping to create a community where everyone has the right to feel safe, respected, listened to and protected.