



## **PEER-ON-PEER ABUSE POLICY**

### **Introduction**

The Governors, the College Leadership Team (CLT), and all staff at Dulwich College are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the College.

In particular, we:

- believe that in order to protect children, all schools should be aware of the level and nature of risk to which their pupils are or may be exposed, and take a contextual whole-school approach to preventing and responding to peer-on-peer abuse;
- recognise national and increasing concern about this issue, and wish to implement this policy in order to ensure that our pupils are safe; and
- encourage parents to engage with us on this issue, so that if their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any of their peers, they should inform the College in order that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

This policy:

- sets out our strategy for preventing, identifying and appropriately managing peer-on-peer abuse;
- applies to all staff;
- will be reviewed annually, and updated in the interim, as may be required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which pupils are or may be exposed;
- is the College's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute peer-on-peer abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the College's [Safeguarding Policy](#) and any other relevant policies including the Behaviour Policy, the Staff Code of Conduct, the ICT Acceptable Use Policy, the Sexting Policy, the Social Media Policy, the Attendance and Registration and Missing Pupil Policies.
- is compliant with the statutory guidance on peer-on-peer abuse as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2018);
- should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

### **Contextual safeguarding**

This policy encapsulates a contextual safeguarding approach, which:

- is an approach to safeguarding children that recognises their experiences of significant harm in extra-familial contexts (for example peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods), and seeks to include these contexts within prevention, identification, assessment and intervention safeguarding activities;
- recognises that as children enter adolescence they spend increasing amounts of time outside of the home in public environments (including online) within which they may experience abuse; and
- considers interventions to change the systems or social conditions of the environments in which abuse has occurred.

### **Understanding peer-on-peer abuse**

Peer-on-peer abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children and within children's relationships (both intimate and non-intimate).

Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms, including: serious bullying (including cyber-bullying), relationship abuse, domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, sexting, youth and serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, and/or gender-based violence.

These types of abuse rarely take place in isolation and often indicate wider safeguarding concerns. Any response to peer-on-peer abuse therefore needs to consider the range of possible types of peer-on-peer abuse set out above and capture the full context of children's experiences. This can be achieved by adopting a contextual safeguarding approach and by ensuring that the College's response to incidents of peer-on-peer abuse takes into account any potential complexity.

### **Problematic or abusive behaviour**

All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.

### **Sexual behaviours**

For the purpose of this policy, harmful sexual behaviours are defined as sexual behaviours expressed by children that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child or adult.

Staff should always use their professional judgment and discuss any concerns with the Deputy Master Pastoral (also the College's Designated Safeguarding Lead).

### **Other behaviour**

When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff should consider, for example, whether it:

- is socially acceptable;
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time;
- is socially acceptable within the peer group;
- is problematic and concerning;
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination eg related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability;
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning;
- involves a power imbalance between the child(ren) allegedly responsible for the behaviour and the child(ren) allegedly the subject of that power;
- involves a misuse of power.

In addition, the College could be required to deal with cases involving a range of alleged behaviours including sexual behaviour, emotional, physical behaviour and digital behaviour.

Behaviour which is not abusive at first may potentially become abusive quickly or over time. Intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour which may be displayed by a child is vital, and could potentially prevent their behaviour from progressing on a continuum to become problematic, abusive and/or violent - and ultimately requiring (greater or more formal) engagement with specialist external and/or statutory agencies.

The importance of intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour does not just apply on an individual pupil basis, but could also apply across the pupil body. Behaviour generally considered inappropriate may in fact indicate emerging concerning behaviour to which schools need to take a whole-school approach in order to prevent escalation.

It will also be important to consider the wider context in which the alleged behaviour is reported to have occurred, and which may trigger the need for a referral. For example, some behaviour that is considered inappropriate may be capable of being dealt with internally. However, if there are wider safeguarding concerns relating to the child(ren) in question, a referral to statutory agencies may be necessary.

Where the behaviour which is the subject of the concern(s) or allegation(s) is considered or suspected by the Deputy Master Pastoral to constitute peer-on-peer abuse, the College will follow the procedures set out below.

### **Identifying a child who is being abused by their peers**

All staff should be alert to the wellbeing of pupils and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by peer-on-peer abuse. However, staff should be mindful of the fact that the way(s) in which children will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ.

Signs that a child may be suffering from peer-on-peer abuse can also overlap with those indicating other types of abuse (please see the Safeguarding Policy for indicators of abuse) and can include:

- failing to attend school, disengaging from classes or struggling to carry out school-related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected;
- physical injuries;
- experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing;
- becoming withdrawn and/or shy; experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety and/or panic attacks; suffering from nightmares or lack of sleep or sleeping too much;
- broader changes in behaviour, including alcohol or substance misuse;
- changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age;
- abusive behaviour towards others.

### **Children who are particularly vulnerable to abusing or being abused by their peers**

Any child can be vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse because of the strength of peer influence during adolescence, and staff should be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all children. Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. Peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a child's vulnerability to such abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers.

Research suggests that peer-on-peer abuse may affect boys differently from girls, and that this difference may result from societal norms (particularly around power, control and the way in which femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological make-up. Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, the College recognises that these may play out differently in our (single sex) environment.

### **A whole-school approach**

#### ***College environment***

The College actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer-on-peer abuse by:

- educating Governors, staff, pupils and parents about this issue. This includes: training all Governors and staff on the nature, prevalence and effect of peer-on-peer abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it. This includes (a) contextual safeguarding; (b) the identification of specific behaviours; and (c) the importance of taking seriously all forms of peer-on-peer abuse (no matter how low level they may appear), and ensuring that no form of peer-on-peer abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing;
- educating children about the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer abuse via the Wellbeing programme and the wider curriculum. Pupils are frequently told what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, the effect that it can have on those who experience it and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse. They are regularly informed about the College's approach to such issues, including its zero tolerance policy towards all forms of peer-on-peer abuse;
- engaging parents on this issue by: talking about it with them, both in groups and one-to-one; asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child; encouraging parents to engage with the College on this issue;
- ensuring that all peer-on-peer abuse issues are fed back to the Deputy Master Pastoral so that she can spot and address any concerning trends and identify pupils who may be in need of additional support;
- challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom);
- working with Governors, staff, pupils and parents to address equality issues, to promote positive values, and to continue to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the College community;
- creating conditions in which our pupils can aspire to and realise safe and healthy relationships;
- creating a culture in which our pupils feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to; and
- responding to cases of peer-on-peer abuse promptly and appropriately.

### **Multi-agency working**

The College actively engages with its local partners in relation to peer-on-peer abuse, and works closely with, for example, the London LSCB, Southwark MASH, children's social care, other relevant agencies, and other schools.

The relationships the College has built with these partners are essential to ensuring that the College is able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of peer-on-peer abuse. They help the College:

- to develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate, as well as the preventative and support services which exist;
- to ensure that our pupils are able to access the range of services and support they need quickly;
- to increase our awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in our local area to enable us to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by our pupils.

The College actively refers concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse where necessary to Southwark MASH, children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies.

### **Responding to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse**

#### ***General principles***

It is essential that all concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse are handled sensitively, promptly, and in an age and gender appropriate way.

Any response will:

- include a thorough investigation of the concerns/allegations and the wider context in which they may have occurred (as appropriate);
- treat all children involved as being at potential risk;
- take into account: that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved, and consider and address the effect of wider socio-cultural contexts (such as the child(ren)'s peer group, both within and outside the College; family; the College environment; their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child(ren)'s online presence);
- consider what changes may need to be made to these contexts to address the child(ren)'s needs and to mitigate risk.

Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the Deputy Master Pastoral will discuss the proposed action with the child(ren) and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made.

#### **Concerns that a child may be at risk of experiencing abuse by their peers(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s)**

If a pupil is in immediate danger, or at risk of significant harm, a referral to children's social care (if the pupil is aged under 18) and/or the police is made immediately. Anyone can make a referral. Where referrals are

not made by the Deputy Master Pastoral, she should be informed as soon as possible that the referral has been made.

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s), they should discuss their concern with the Deputy Master Pastoral or a Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay (in accordance with the safeguarding policy) so that a course of action can be agreed. Contact details for the College's safeguarding leads are available [here](#).

If a pupil speaks to a member of staff about peer-on-peer abuse that they have witnessed or are a part of, the member of staff should listen to the child and use open language that demonstrates understanding rather than judgement. For further details please see the procedure set out in the Safeguarding Policy.

### **The College's response to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse**

The Deputy Master Pastoral will discuss the concerns or allegations with the member of staff who has reported them and will, where necessary, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the child(ren) affected.

The Deputy Master Pastoral will use her professional judgement to determine whether it is appropriate for alleged behaviour to be dealt with internally and, if so, whether any external specialist support is required. In borderline cases the Deputy Master Pastoral may wish to consult with children's social care and/or any other external agencies on a no-names basis to determine the most appropriate response.

Where the Deputy Master Pastoral considers or suspects that the behaviour in question might be abusive or violent (as opposed to inappropriate or problematic), she will contact Southwark MASH immediately, and in any event within 24 hours of their becoming aware of it. The Deputy Master Pastoral will discuss the allegations/concerns with Southwark MASH and agree on a course of action, which may include to:

- manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible;
- contribute to an inter-agency early help assessment;
- refer the child to children's social care;
- report alleged criminal behaviour to the police.

### **Individual risk and needs assessment**

Where there is an incident of peer-on-peer abuse, the College will carry out a risk assessment in respect of each child affected by the abuse. These risk assessments will:

- assess and address the nature and level of risks that are posed and/or faced by the child;

- engage the child's parents and draw upon local services and agencies to ensure that the child's needs are met in the long term;
- consider whether any targeted interventions are needed to address the underlying attitudes or behaviour of any child; and
- be reviewed at regular intervals in light of the child's on-going needs to ensure that real progress is being made which benefits the child.

If at any stage the child's needs escalate, the Deputy Master Pastoral will contact Southwark MASH to determine the appropriate course of action.

### **Disciplinary action**

The College will consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any pupil(s) involved; any such action should address the abuse, the causes of it, and attitudes underlying it. Disciplinary action may be appropriate:

- to ensure that the pupil(s) take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour;
- to demonstrate to the pupil(s) and others that peer-on-peer abuse can never be tolerated; and
- to ensure the safety and wellbeing of other pupils.

However, these considerations must be balanced against the pupil's/pupils' own potential unmet needs and any safeguarding concerns. Before deciding on appropriate action, the College will always consider its duty to safeguard all pupils from harm; the underlying reasons for a child's behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse suffered by the child; the risk that the child may pose to other children; and the severity of the peer-on-peer abuse and the causes of it.