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Quality Assurance Policies & Procedures

SAFEGUARDING AND PREVENT POLICY

CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION

Appendix H

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is 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. This may be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even where the sexual activity appears consensual. CSE may involve physical contact, including penetrative and non-penetrative acts, or non-contact activity using technology. It may occur without the child's immediate knowledge, for example where images or videos are copied or shared. Children cannot consent to their own exploitation; apparent compliance, affection or a seemingly consensual relationship does not remove the abuse. Children may not recognise themselves as victims, may not disclose what is happening and may show no obvious external signs.

Child Sexual Exploitation

- can affect any child or young person under the age of 18, including 16- and 17-year-olds who can legally consent to sexual activity but cannot consent to exploitation;
- can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
- can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
- can take place in person or through technology, including social media, messaging, livestreaming, image sharing and coercion involving nude or semi-nude imagery, or through a combination of online and offline activity;
- can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge, including where others copy, manipulate, distribute or threaten to share images or videos;
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, adults or children. It may be a one-off incident or a series of incidents, ranging from opportunistic abuse to complex organised exploitation. It can occur outside the home, within peer groups, intimate relationships, neighbourhoods or organised networks, and children may be coerced, moved or trafficked between locations for sexual exploitation; and
- is typified by an imbalance of power in favour of those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. Although age may be the most obvious factor, power may also arise from social or economic status, access to resources, cognitive or physical ability, dependency, isolation, or control of a child's online or offline relationships.

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The following may indicate child sexual exploitation, but the list is not exhaustive and some children show no obvious signs. Changes in behaviour, attendance or engagement must be considered in the context of possible abuse and not treated solely as misconduct:

- children who appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- children who associate with other young people involved in exploitation;
- children who have older boyfriends or girlfriends;
- children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant;
- children who suffer from changes in emotional well-being;
- children who misuse drugs and alcohol;
- children who go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late; and
- children who regularly miss school or education or do not take part in education
- children who have unexplained changes in online behaviour, increased secrecy about devices, new or unknown online contacts, sexualised messages, or concerns about nude or semi-nude images being requested, created, threatened or shared.

Staff response

- Act immediately and report any concern to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a deputy without delay.
- Make a clear, factual and timely safeguarding record and follow the College's child protection, information-sharing and referral procedures.
- Where a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, contact the police on 999 and/or make an immediate referral to children's social care in accordance with local procedures.
- Consider timely Family Help and support from relevant community services where this is appropriate, without delaying a statutory referral when the threshold is met.
- Do not investigate, promise confidentiality or confront an alleged perpetrator. Listen, reassure the child that they have done the right thing by speaking, avoid leading questions, preserve possible evidence and follow the DSL's direction.

Child sexual exploitation: prevention and intervention

Principal statutory guidance: Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (in force from 1 September 2026).

The Department for Education's **Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners**, published 16 February 2017, remains supplementary practice guidance.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>