



THORNTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Love • Respect • Ambition

Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

This policy should be read alongside the school's Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Online Safety Policy, RSE/Relationships Education Policy, SEND Policy and Attendance Policy. It sets out Thornton Primary School's approach to preventing, identifying and responding to child-on-child abuse, including harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence.

Policy Statement

At Thornton Primary School, the safety, dignity and wellbeing of every child is paramount. Child-on-child abuse is never acceptable, whether it occurs in school, during school activities, outside school or online. We recognise that children can harm other children and that a child who has caused harm may also have safeguarding needs. We therefore respond in a child-centred, proportionate and safeguarding-led way.

For the purposes of this policy, 'child' or 'pupil' normally means anyone under 18. 'Parent' includes anyone with parental responsibility or another person with appropriate care of the child. The policy uses the term 'child-on-child abuse', consistent with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026, and includes harassment and violence.

KCSIE 2026 comes into force on 1 September 2026. It requires schools to have policies and procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse and to respond appropriately to concerns. The 2026 guidance specifically strengthens its focus on harmful sexual behaviour, misogyny/misandry, intimate relationships, physical assault and harm, threats involving weapons, and consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, including AI-generated images.

Introduction

Child-on-child abuse can have a significant and lasting impact on children's safety, emotional wellbeing, attendance, relationships and ability to learn. It can occur as a single incident or as a repeated pattern. It may be physical, emotional, sexual, online or relational, and different forms of abuse may overlap.

There is not always a clear boundary between inappropriate behaviour, bullying, conflict, developmentally expected behaviour and abusive behaviour. Professional judgement is therefore required. The school will consider the age and developmental stage of the children, the nature and seriousness of the behaviour, any power imbalance, repetition, vulnerability, intent, context and impact.

We will never dismiss harmful behaviour as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', 'part of growing up' or 'boys being boys'. KCSIE 2026 makes clear that such language can contribute to a culture of unacceptable behaviour, misogyny and an unsafe environment.



Ethos

All children have the right to feel safe and respected at Thornton Primary School. We are committed to an inclusive environment in which children can report concerns without fear of blame, shame, retaliation or discrimination.

- We maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here'.
- All concerns are taken seriously and responded to promptly.
- We do not assume that a lack of reports means that abuse is not happening.
- We recognise that children may not have the language, confidence or communication skills to report abuse.
- We make reasonable adjustments and provide additional support where SEND, disability, communication needs or other vulnerabilities create barriers to reporting or being heard.
- We consider the safety and needs of every child involved, including the child who has experienced harm, the child alleged to have caused harm and other affected children.
- We consider both online and offline contexts and the wider community in which children live and socialise.

Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse through effective prevention and education;
- ensure staff recognise signs, indicators and patterns of harmful behaviour;
- provide clear procedures for reporting, recording, assessing and responding to concerns;
- ensure children are listened to, taken seriously and supported;
- ensure responses are proportionate, fair and safeguarding-led;
- identify wider contextual or systemic factors contributing to harm;
- provide appropriate support and intervention for children who display harmful behaviour;
- work effectively with parents/carers, Lancashire safeguarding partners, Police, Children's Social Care and specialist services where required; and
- learn from incidents and patterns to improve practice, supervision, curriculum and safeguarding arrangements.

Entitlement and Inclusion

We comply with the Equality Act 2010 and recognise that any child can experience or cause harm. We will not make assumptions about victims or alleged perpetrators based on sex, gender, disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, family circumstances, care status or any other characteristic.

Children with SEND or health conditions may face additional barriers to recognising, communicating or reporting abuse and may be disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment. Staff will remain professionally curious and will not automatically attribute changes in behaviour, mood or communication to a child's SEND or health condition. Concerns involving a child with SEND will be considered with the DSL and SENCO as appropriate.

Implementation



This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, governors, visitors and other adults working with children at Thornton Primary School. It is reviewed annually and sooner where statutory guidance, local safeguarding procedures, technology, emerging risks or lessons learned require change.

What is Child-on-Child Abuse?

Child-on-child abuse is abuse or harmful behaviour perpetrated by one child or group of children towards another child or group. It can occur face-to-face, online, or across both environments. It can occur between children of different ages or the same age and may involve an imbalance of power, coercion, intimidation, exploitation or repeated behaviour.

KCSIE 2026 identifies a range of behaviours which can fall within child-on-child abuse, including:

- bullying, including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying;
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children, including teenage relationship abuse;
- physical abuse, including hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling and other physical harm;
- physical assault and harm, or threats of harm involving a weapon;
- harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence, including misogynistic or misandrist behaviour;
- consensual and non-consensual making or sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, including images generated or altered using artificial intelligence;
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent;
- upskirting; and
- initiation/hazing-type violence and rituals.

This list is not exhaustive. Child-on-child abuse may also include financial exploitation, coercive or controlling behaviour, serious youth violence, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation and behaviour motivated by prejudice.

Power and Vulnerability

Power can arise from age, size, physical strength, confidence, social status, popularity, access to information, group membership, communication ability, SEND, perceived vulnerability or knowledge of what upsets another child. Power imbalances can change over time and across contexts.

The school will consider whether the behaviour is part of a pattern and whether other children may also have been affected. A child who appears to have caused harm may themselves have experienced abuse, exploitation, exposure to harmful sexual behaviour or other adverse experiences. This does not excuse harmful behaviour, but it informs a safeguarding response.



Contextual Safeguarding and Extra-Familial Harm

Safeguarding concerns do not stop at the school gate. Child-on-child abuse may take place in the community, on transport, at clubs, in parks, in other schools or settings, or through online platforms and group chats. The DSL will consider the wider context in which incidents occur and whether other children may be at risk.

KCSIE 2026 highlights extra-familial harms including sexual abuse and exploitation, teenage relationship abuse, criminal exploitation, financial exploitation, serious youth violence, county lines and radicalisation. Technology may be a significant component and online and offline harms may occur concurrently. [Return to top of page](#)

Where patterns emerge, the school will consider whether there are environmental or systemic factors that need to change. This may include supervision, curriculum, routines, physical spaces, online safety, peer culture or communication with families and safeguarding partners.

Prevention

Prevention begins before an incident occurs. Thornton Primary School will use a whole-school approach that promotes Love, Respect and Ambition and reinforces our expectations to Be Responsible, Be Ready and Be Kind.

- Relationships Education and the wider curriculum will teach children about respectful relationships, boundaries, consent as developmentally appropriate, online safety, privacy, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, and how to seek help.
- Staff will explicitly challenge prejudice-based language, sexualised language, misogyny, misandry and other harmful stereotypes.
- Children will be taught that abuse is not normal, inevitable or acceptable.
- Staff will monitor less visible areas, transitions, playtimes and online concerns where appropriate.
- The school will use pupil voice, behaviour information, safeguarding records and other intelligence to identify patterns and emerging risks.
- Parents/carers will be informed about how to raise concerns and will be encouraged to work with school.
- Lessons learned from incidents will inform supervision, risk assessments, curriculum and staff development.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that schools should keep policies, processes and curriculum under constant review, particularly where patterns of harmful sexual behaviour, harassment or violence may indicate wider environmental or systemic issues.

Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour involving a real or perceived power imbalance and repeated behaviour, or behaviour with the potential to be repeated. It can be physical, verbal, relational or online. Prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying will always be taken seriously.

Cyberbullying can occur at any time and can involve a potentially large audience. It may include abusive messages, exclusion from groups, threats, humiliating content, image sharing or harassment. Concerns that occur outside school may still require a safeguarding response where they affect a child's welfare or create risks within school.



Responses will follow the Anti-Bullying and Behaviour Policies while also considering whether the behaviour amounts to a safeguarding concern.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Sexual behaviours exist on a continuum. Some behaviour may be developmentally expected, while other behaviour may be harmful, abusive or criminal. The school will consider the age and developmental stage of the children, context, frequency, consent, coercion, power imbalance, impact and any wider safeguarding concerns.

Any concern about harmful sexual behaviour will be referred to the DSL without delay. The DSL will determine the appropriate safeguarding response, seeking advice from Lancashire safeguarding partners, Children's Social Care, Police or specialist services where required.

The school will not use informal resolution where this would minimise harm, place a child at risk or compromise a safeguarding investigation.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence

Sexual harassment and sexual violence can occur between children of any sex, as a single incident or as a pattern, online or offline. Sexual harassment may include sexual comments, jokes, gestures, sexualised name-calling, unwanted touching, sexualised online communication or sharing sexual content.

Sexual violence includes rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault. Sexual violence and sexual harassment are never acceptable and will not be treated as an inevitable part of growing up.

Reports will be managed in accordance with Part Five of KCSIE 2026. The DSL will make decisions case-by-case, prioritising safety, support, risk assessment, information sharing and appropriate referral. [\[cite\]turn2view1](#)

Misogyny, Misandry and Gender-Based Abuse

Thornton Primary School recognises that child-on-child abuse can be motivated or reinforced by misogyny, misandry or gender stereotypes. KCSIE 2026 specifically includes misogynistic and misandrist behaviour within its consideration of harmful sexual behaviour, sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Staff will challenge language and behaviour that degrades, humiliates, intimidates or stereotypes children because of sex or gender. We will consider whether apparently isolated incidents form part of a wider pattern or culture.

Nudes and Semi-Nudes, Including AI-Generated Images

The school will use the terminology 'nudes and semi-nudes' and recognise that images may be photographs, videos, livestreams, digitally altered content or wholly generated using artificial intelligence, including 'deepfakes' or 'deep nudes'. KCSIE 2026 expressly includes consensual and non-consensual making or sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, including AI-generated images.



If a child reports that an image has been created, received, possessed or shared, staff will not view, copy, download, print, screenshot or forward the image. Staff will report the concern immediately to the DSL and follow the current DfE/UKCIS advice.

The DSL will consider the child's age, developmental stage, circumstances, consent, coercion, exploitation, distribution and wider safeguarding context. Where appropriate, the school will involve Police, Children's Social Care and specialist support. Current DfE advice includes risk assessment, safeguarding support, handling devices and images, recording and working with other agencies.

Where a device may contain evidence, staff will follow the school's searching, screening and confiscation procedures and will seek appropriate advice rather than accessing or circulating illegal imagery.

Upskirting and Other Image-Based Abuse

Upskirting is a criminal offence and involves taking or attempting to take an image under a person's clothing without permission, normally for sexual gratification or to cause humiliation, distress or alarm. Any concern will be referred to the DSL immediately and managed as a safeguarding matter.

The school will also respond to image-based humiliation, threats to share images, coercion to produce images, edited or AI-generated sexualised images and the non-consensual distribution of sexual content.

Disclosure and Reporting

The first response to a disclosure is critical. Staff will listen calmly, take the child seriously and avoid leading questions. Staff will not promise confidentiality. They will explain that information will be shared with the people who need to know in order to keep the child safe.

- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling an adult.
- Do not investigate or interview the child beyond establishing sufficient information to safeguard them.
- Do not ask leading or suggestive questions.
- Record the child's words as accurately as possible, distinguishing fact from professional opinion.
- Report the concern to the DSL or deputy immediately and record it on CPOMS in accordance with school procedures.
- If the DSL is unavailable and there is immediate risk, staff must follow the school's emergency safeguarding arrangements and contact the appropriate safeguarding agency or Police.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to take reports seriously, support victims and avoid making children feel that they are causing a problem by reporting abuse. Children may not recognise their experiences as harmful or may face barriers to disclosure; staff must therefore maintain professional curiosity.

Recording and Information Sharing



All concerns and incidents will be recorded accurately, promptly and securely. Records will identify the concern, actions taken, decisions made, rationale, referrals, outcomes and any ongoing risk-management arrangements.

CPOMS will be used for safeguarding recording in line with the school's procedures. Records must be factual, contemporaneous and sufficiently detailed to allow another safeguarding professional to understand the concern and the actions taken.

Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with safeguarding and data protection requirements. Staff must not promise confidentiality. Where there is a safeguarding reason to share information, data protection legislation does not prevent appropriate information sharing.

Initial Safeguarding Response

When a concern is received, the DSL will consider:

- the immediate safety of the child and whether emergency action is required;
- the age and developmental stage of all children involved;
- the nature, seriousness and frequency of the behaviour;
- any power imbalance, coercion or intimidation;
- whether there may be other victims or witnesses;
- SEND, disability, communication needs and other vulnerabilities;
- the online and offline context;
- any relevant family, peer, community or contextual factors;
- whether the child alleged to have caused harm may themselves be at risk; and
- whether Children's Social Care, Police, health or specialist services should be involved.

The school will follow Lancashire safeguarding partnership procedures and seek advice where thresholds or appropriate next steps are unclear.

Immediate Safety and Risk Assessment

Where there is an allegation of child-on-child abuse, the school will undertake an individual risk and needs assessment for each child affected, including the child alleged to have caused harm. The assessment will be proportionate, recorded and reviewed.

- The child who has experienced harm will be considered first in relation to immediate protection and support.
- The possibility of other victims will be considered.
- Risks posed by and to the child alleged to have caused harm will be assessed.
- Arrangements will be considered for lessons, playtimes, toilets, corridors, clubs, transport, trips and other relevant contexts.
- Online risks and contact between children outside school will be considered where relevant.
- Parents/carers will normally be involved unless doing so would increase risk or prejudice safeguarding or criminal enquiries.



- Professional risk assessments from social care, Police or specialist services will inform school arrangements where available.
- The assessment will identify targeted interventions and will be reviewed as the situation changes.

The purpose of a risk assessment is not to determine guilt. It is to keep children safe while concerns are assessed and responded to.

Separation and Education

Where necessary, reasonable steps will be taken to reduce contact between children. Any adjustment to a child's timetable, teaching arrangements or access to activities will be proportionate and reviewed regularly. The school will avoid arrangements that unnecessarily disadvantage the child who has experienced abuse.

The child alleged to have caused harm remains entitled to education and safeguarding support. Any restrictions will be based on risk and the school's Behaviour and safeguarding procedures.

Safeguarding and Supporting the Child Who Has Experienced Harm

The school will listen to the child's wishes and feelings and seek to provide as much control over the process as is safely possible. Support will be tailored to age, developmental stage, SEND, communication needs, family circumstances and the nature of the incident.

- The child will be reassured that they are not to blame.
- The child will not be required to confront or mediate with the child alleged to have caused harm.
- A trusted adult will be identified where appropriate.
- The school will monitor wellbeing, attendance, learning and peer relationships.
- Appropriate pastoral, therapeutic or specialist support will be considered.
- Parents/carers will be kept informed where safe and appropriate.
- Support will continue after the immediate incident and will be reviewed.

Safeguarding and Supporting the Child Alleged to Have Caused Harm

A safeguarding response will also be provided to a child who has allegedly caused harm. This does not minimise or excuse the behaviour. The school will consider whether the child has experienced abuse, exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, exposure to pornography, domestic abuse or other factors that may require intervention.

The response will consider age, developmental stage, SEND, vulnerability, risk to others, the nature of the behaviour and any professional advice. Support and sanctions will be proportionate and case-specific.

Where appropriate, the school will seek specialist support to address harmful behaviour, attitudes, relationships and underlying needs. A child may need help to understand boundaries, consent, respectful relationships, emotional regulation and the impact of their actions.



Other Children Affected

Child-on-child abuse can affect witnesses, friends, siblings, classmates and wider peer groups. The school will consider whether other children require support, reassurance, supervision or curriculum intervention.

Where an incident is likely to have affected the wider school community, the school will respond sensitively without identifying individual children unnecessarily.

Parents and Carers

Parents/carers will normally be informed of safeguarding concerns involving their child unless doing so would place the child at greater risk, prejudice a Police investigation or otherwise be contrary to safeguarding advice.

Parents/carers will be given clear information about the school's response where it is safe and appropriate to do so. The school will not disclose confidential information about another child.

Police and Children's Social Care

Where a child is at immediate risk of harm or there is reasonable cause to suspect significant harm, the school will make an appropriate referral without delay. Anyone can make a referral; where someone other than the DSL makes the referral, the DSL should be informed as soon as possible.

Sexual violence and other behaviour may constitute criminal offences. The DSL will seek advice from Police and/or Children's Social Care where appropriate. The school will not attempt to conduct a criminal investigation and will take care not to compromise external enquiries.

For children under 13, sexual activity is a safeguarding concern requiring careful assessment and appropriate referral. Decisions for older children will also consider age, development, consent, coercion, exploitation and other safeguarding factors. The school will follow current statutory guidance and local safeguarding procedures.

Behaviour and Sanctions

The school's Behaviour Policy will be used alongside this safeguarding policy. Sanctions will never replace safeguarding action.

Before deciding on a consequence, the school will consider the seriousness of the behaviour, age, developmental stage, intent, context, SEND and other vulnerabilities, previous patterns, impact on others, unmet needs and risk to other children. This supports a proportionate and equitable response.

Restorative approaches may be considered where they are safe, appropriate and genuinely beneficial. Restorative work will never be used to require a victim to forgive, meet or engage with another child.

Suspension or permanent exclusion may be considered where appropriate under statutory guidance and the school's Behaviour Policy, but exclusion is not itself a safeguarding intervention and will not be used simply to remove the safeguarding problem.



Learning from Incidents

Following significant incidents or patterns, the DSL and senior leaders will consider what can be learned. This may include reviewing supervision, staffing, physical spaces, curriculum, online safety, communication, risk assessments, staff training and the effectiveness of reporting routes.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that patterns of harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence may identify environmental or systemic problems. Schools should use emerging trends to review policies, processes and curriculum and, where appropriate, share trends with safeguarding partners.

Prevention and Education

Our preventative curriculum will be age-appropriate and inclusive. It will help children understand:

- healthy and respectful friendships and relationships;
- personal space, boundaries and bodily autonomy;
- how to recognise behaviour that makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable;
- how and where to report concerns;
- the importance of respectful communication online and offline;
- the risks associated with sharing images and sexualised content;
- that harmful behaviour is never excused by claims of humour, popularity or peer pressure; and
- how to seek help for themselves or a friend.

The school will use assemblies, Relationships Education, Computing/Online Safety, PSHE and other curriculum opportunities to address emerging issues. Content will be adapted for pupils' age, developmental stage and SEND.

Staff Training and Professional Curiosity

All staff receive safeguarding and child protection training at induction and regular updates. Training will include child-on-child abuse and harmful sexual behaviour, reporting routes, online safety, recognising patterns, supporting disclosures and the needs of vulnerable children.

Staff are expected to remain professionally curious. A change in behaviour, attendance, friendship groups, presentation, emotional wellbeing or engagement may indicate a safeguarding concern. Staff must not wait for a child to make a disclosure before raising a concern.

Staff will know how to report concerns through CPOMS and directly to the DSL/a Deputy DSL. The school will monitor the quality and timeliness of safeguarding records and actions.

SEND and Additional Vulnerability



Thornton Primary School has a strong commitment to inclusion. Some pupils with SEND may be more vulnerable to bullying, exploitation or harmful behaviour and may have additional barriers to communicating what has happened. Staff will consider communication methods, sensory needs, developmental age, social understanding, emotional regulation and reasonable adjustments when responding to concerns. The SENCO and relevant professionals will be involved where this supports a child's safeguarding needs.

The school will not assume that behaviour associated with SEND explains away indicators of abuse. Equally, the school will avoid treating a child's disability or additional needs as evidence of vulnerability without considering the individual context.

Reporting Routes for Children

Children are encouraged to speak to any trusted adult in school. Staff will listen and pass concerns to the DSL. Children will be reminded that they can report concerns about themselves or another child, including concerns that happen outside school or online.

The school will ensure reporting routes are accessible to pupils with communication needs, SEND or other barriers to disclosure.

Monitoring, Governance and Review

The DSL will monitor incidents and patterns of child-on-child abuse and report relevant themes to the Headteacher and governing body through safeguarding reporting arrangements. Monitoring will consider the effectiveness of prevention, reporting, response, support, recording and follow-up.

The governing body will ensure that the school has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures and that child-on-child abuse is included within the wider child protection framework, as required by KCSIE 2026.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where there are changes to statutory guidance, Lancashire safeguarding procedures, DfE advice, technology or emerging safeguarding risks.

Related Guidance and Legislation

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, Department for Education – statutory guidance, effective from 1 September 2026.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 – statutory multi-agency safeguarding guidance.
- Department for Education: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes – advice for education settings, updated March 2024.
- Education Act 2002 and relevant safeguarding legislation.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and relevant current data protection legislation.
- Relevant Lancashire safeguarding partnership procedures and local thresholds.
- Thornton Primary School Child Protection, Behaviour, Anti-Bullying, Online Safety, RSE/Relationships Education and SEND policies.



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Signed: David Ashcroft, Headteacher

Date: September 2026

Review Date: September 2027

To be agreed by the Staffing, Finance and Resources Committee on 03/11/2026