

14 June 2021

EVERYONE'S INVITED & PEER ON PEER SEXUAL ABUSE:

Dear parents and carers

Writing this letter is a sombre but necessary duty. My main aim is to give you every reassurance that there is nothing more important to us than your son or daughter's health and safety. You will have seen news reports in recent months, including that on the recent Ofsted safeguarding investigation, and read about the **Everyone's Invited** website.

I think it is true that technology and social media have exacerbated the situation rapidly, and also true that because of low levels of student reporting, this had been largely missed across the sector.

Our commitment is to work on the lines that Ofsted is suggesting below, as all schools must. The Government have accepted the report in full. Our assumption, until such time as we know this is not true, is that it is prevalent in our schools. It is also an assumption that this affects **all** learners of whatever age: some of the attitudes and behaviours formed early in life are the strongest and most influential of all, and dictate future patterns and developments. Brain chemistry suggests it is hard to unlearn some lessons, in fact.

We have a common mission, then, to improve the current situation in the next eighteen months, and I have summarised below in some detail the Ofsted findings as well as recommendations for schools and trusts. This process has already begun in our schools and we have already carried out a baseline check with all ten schools as to the current situation.

Overview of the Ofsted Report

Ofsted's review involved visits to 32 schools and colleges. The inspectorate spoke to over 900 children and young people about the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, in their lives and the lives of their peers. They also spoke to leaders, teachers, governors, local safeguarding partners, parents and stakeholders

The review reveals how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people. It is concerning that the report finds that for some children, incidents are so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them. It finds that the issue is so widespread that schools should act as though sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening, even when there are no specific reports.

The report recommends that leaders should take a whole school/college/trust approach to developing a culture where all kinds of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are recognised and addressed. To achieve this, the report says that leaders need to create an environment where staff model respectful and appropriate behaviour, where children and young people are clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and where they are confident to ask for help and support when they need it.

Central to this is the new [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education curriculum](#). The new curriculum advocates the explicit teaching and development of important attributes such as respect, honesty, kindness, tolerance and courtesy. Important issues such as personal privacy, respect and consent to ensure that more young people have a good understanding of how to behave towards their peers, are part of the guidance.

We also need to change culture – not just in schools but in wider society. We need sanctions and interventions to tackle poor behaviour and provide support for children and young people who need it.

When it comes to sexual violence, the report finds that leaders are increasingly having to make difficult decisions that guidance does not equip them to make. For example, some leaders are unsure how to proceed when criminal investigations do not lead to a prosecution or conviction. The report says that leaders should not be left to navigate these 'grey areas' without sufficient guidance.

Furthermore, the current guidance does not clearly differentiate between different types of behaviour or reflect the language that children and young people use, particularly for online sexual abuse. Schools cannot tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, on their own, and neither should they.

The report begins to build a common language and set of common definitions in this difficult and sensitive area. Many of these issues are a much wider problem than schools can address. The report says that while schools can play a part, it is not only their sole responsibility to solve it.

Recommendations for Schools and Trusts

The Ofsted review recommends that even when there are no specific reports, a whole-school or whole-trust approach is needed. This should include:

- A carefully sequenced RSHE curriculum, based on the DfE's statutory guidance, that specifically includes sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. This should include time for open discussion of topics that children and young people tell us they find particularly difficult, such as consent and the sending of 'nudes'.
- High-quality training for teachers delivering RSHE.
- Routine record-keeping and analysis of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, to identify patterns and intervene early to prevent abuse.
- A behavioural approach, including sanctions when appropriate, to reinforce a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated.
- Working closely in the area where the school or college is located so they are aware of the range of support available to children and young people who are victims or who perpetrate harmful sexual behaviour.
- Support for designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), such as protected time in timetables, to engage
- Training to ensure that all staff (and governors, where relevant) are able to:
 - better understand the definitions of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse;
 - identify early signs of peer-on-peer sexual abuse;
 - consistently uphold standards in their responses to sexual harassment and online sexual abuse.

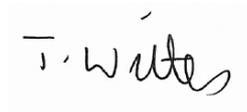
As you see and would expect, considerable energies will be going into this from today onwards. It would be helpful to receive any feedback from yourselves: what we see in schools is sometimes a different perspective to what you observe at home.

At the same time, it is also true to say that a mobile phone, on the other side of the room and at an angle, is hard to descry. It will be an enormous help to learn from parents what the state of play is, and for you to be having those difficult and courageous conversations as to what they have experienced. As the father of three twenty-somethings, I know how hard this can be. But now it is unavoidable and necessary.

Forgive me for the length and complexity of the communication, but I thought you would want to know the level of our concern and commitment. As educators we are aware that this is a considerable challenge, but we are confident that we can make real progress so that young people will be safer and happier in our area. We must; we can; we will.

Take care, and again be reassured of our absolute commitment to make a difference – the least you would expect.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Withers

**Chief Executive Officer
Palladian Academy Trust**