

21 June 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

Sexual Abuse in Schools

I am writing to you on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Wellsway Multi Academy Trust (WMAT).

During the last few months, you will have seen items in the media relating to ‘child-on-child’ abuse within educational establishments, linked to a social media campaign. The Department for Education asked Ofsted to look into this and the report has just been published. The purpose of this letter is to give you reassurance that this issue is taken very seriously indeed and to outline how our Trust responds.

First and foremost, we want to make it clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable, will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up. Behaviours of this nature will always be challenged and appropriate disciplinary action taken, in line with each school’s Behaviour Policy. This behaviour causes embarrassment, distress and humiliation and can leave a deep and lasting impact. Dismissing or tolerating such behaviours risks normalising them and is something we will never accept.

Our Trust Safeguarding Child Protection Policy gives very clear guidance on ‘child-on-child’ sexual violence and sexual harassment and regular, on-going training for staff covers this. This makes the expectations and actions very clear, to help minimise the risk of it occurring and making clear what to do when it occurs or is alleged to have occurred. Staff are also made aware that safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via ‘child-on-child’ abuse.

Each school has a named member of the senior leadership team who is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). They monitor and respond to reports of this nature and keep a record on the school’s electronic child protection register. Our Trust Safeguarding Lead monitors incidents across the Trust and reports any concerns to the Trust Executive and to the Board’s Audit & Risk Committee.

From an educational point of view, each school’s approach to health and well-being includes:

- High quality, age appropriate Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE), as part of a programme of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education.
- Meaningful opportunities for pupil voice, where students can discuss and contribute to improving aspects of school life.

- Clear and effective behaviour and anti-bullying policies, including sanctions when appropriate, to reinforce a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated.
- A caring pastoral system, with procedures for students to raise concerns about themselves and their peers. This will include working closely with local agencies providing support to children and young people who are victims or who perpetrate harmful sexual behaviour.

If you become aware of an incident of this nature involving your child, or another child, please do report it to the school. We will work very closely with a range of agencies, including the police and social care, should it need to be escalated further.

Education is a partnership between home and school and this is a very good example of where, and why, this partnership needs to be strong. Through working together and giving the same message to children and young people, in school and at home, we can promote the importance of healthy, respectful relationships and help to eradicate such shameful and harmful behaviour.

Thank you for your support and we hope this letter will reassure you about the approach we take to what has been highlighted as a serious issue in UK schools.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Arlidge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Andrea Arlidge
Chief Executive