

Everyone's Safer:

supporting effective leadership responses to harmful sexual behaviour in schools

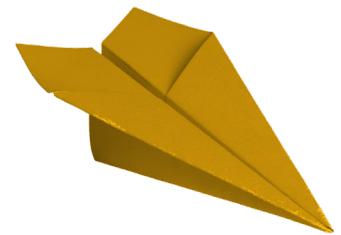
An interim report on the first year of the project's findings¹

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¹This report summarises project progress and findings from January - December 2022. The project timeline has two years remaining, during which we will work with a further ten secondary schools per year. The intended audience for this report is the interested parties from the schools involved, other education staff and project partners. If you have any questions about anything contained within this report, please contact the project lead, Laura Nott: lnott@lucyfaithfull.org.uk



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Executive Summary

Introduction and context

In June 2021, Ofsted published its report on the UK government-mandated rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. The report concluded:

“This rapid thematic review has revealed how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people. It is concerning that for some children, incidents are so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them.”²

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF), via the Stop It Now! UK and Ireland helpline, offers support to anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse. Following the publication of the Ofsted report, there was a marked increase in enquiries from education professionals, either seeking support in response to specific incidents or for help to equip their staff to deal with harmful attitudes and abusive and harassing behaviours amongst students.

Aiming to support effective school leadership responses, LFF sought funding to undertake a three-year action research project asking: *what works to respond to and prevent harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) in schools? How can we develop whole-school cultures of resilience so that young people feel safer?*

Project aims

Respond



Support 30 schools to manage incidents or issues, providing support for pupils, staff, parents and teachers; advise on providing an appropriate welfare-centred response to all children and families affected; help restore a sense of safety; guide leaders to consider what might have contributed to the incident occurring; provide ongoing consultation as they review protocols, procedures, and physical environments; provide training and workshops to meet the individual needs of each school community.

Learn



Undertake an action research evaluation; draw early learning from the first schools supporting project progression; write up case studies after each engagement; produce interim reports at the end of each year and a final report at the end of the project; produce evidence and data contributing to the ongoing development and updates needed for the RSHE curriculum, especially on the themes of sexual harassment, sexual violence, cyber resilience, pornography and consent; sharing interim findings with government and school stakeholders (Ofsted, Department of Education (DfE) Home Office, Education Scotland, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

Prevent



Produce a final report to include recommendations for government; strategically influence governmental responses, and the adaptation, strengthening and creating of guidance needed to address the prevalence of sexual harm in schools (e.g. Keeping Children Safe in Education); share what we have learnt and what preventative measures schools can implement to make their communities safer; develop resources for schools to use and shared widely with support from partners (DfE, Ofsted, Home Office).

What we did

Supported by the KPMG Foundation, the project launched in January 2022, with the first project year running from January – December 2022. After ethical approval was gained, the project was promoted to schools in the West Midlands and five surrounding counties. A project inclusion matrix was developed to ensure a broad, diverse range of schools were selected.

Initial visits were conducted, working with staff, students and parents to identify the HSB issues in each setting. Bespoke engagement plans and tailored packages of interventions were developed to address the identified issues. Interventions were primarily delivered by the Principal Investigator (or project lead), Ms Laura Nott, and included different combinations of staff training, staff focus groups, workshops with parents, student focus groups, student education programmes and safety planning work with individual students. The evaluation of interventions was led by Dr Emily Setty at the University of Surrey.

By the end of year one, ten summary case study reports were written on the work carried out in each school, and a summary of the cross-cutting themes generated as part of the evaluation is provided below.

- **Concerns about HSB:** How HSB is conceptualised may differ between staff and students, leading to different perspectives on how it should be addressed. Responding to and tackling HSB in schools requires critical reflection on the part of the staff as well as attention to the issues thought to be affecting students
- **Causes of HSB:** Noted causes (as perceived by both staff and students) of HSB across schools ranged from emotional dysregulation, experiences of abuse in the home, sexist attitudes and beliefs, peer pressure, poor understandings of consent and healthy/unhealthy relationships, and normalised 'banter' and low-level harassment, among others. Online sexual behaviours were considered a problem in most schools, pertaining to pornography and sexual/nude image sharing in particular
- **Issues identified by students during focus groups:**
 - ▶ perceptions and experiences of safety among students varied widely
 - ▶ Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) is generally valued but students identified constraints due to variation in practice among teachers and perceptions that RSHE does not reflect the reality of young people's lives
 - ▶ students expressed a lack of confidence in available reporting mechanisms within schools and were, therefore, reluctant to use them
 - ▶ there was a clear desire among young people to be part of identifying problems and developing solutions rather than just being told what to do by adults
 - ▶ gender stereotypes and inequalities were of concern to many
- **Consistency with other studies on HSB and RSHE:** students' concerns were largely consistent with insights from other studies and reviews of HSB among young people in schools (please see section 6.4)
- **Identifying, reporting, and responding to HSB:** many schools emphasised the need to achieve consistency in awareness among students, parents, and school staff about what constitutes HSB and to improve willingness and ability to report and tackle incidents, including through preventative action

Year one learning and promising practice

Based upon the impact evaluations of the interventions delivered, three resources have been particularly well-received by staff and students. All three are primary prevention approaches within the public health model of prevention, namely universal prevention approaches that can be delivered to all students, whether or not they have been affected by HSB. Primary prevention approaches were used, as part of this project, in secondary schools, but they can also be adapted for use in primary schools. They are summarised below, but richer insights can be gleaned from case study reports in section 7.

Protective Behaviours training for education professionals

Two whole-school staff teams received a one-day introductory training course (certificated by the Protective Behaviours Consortium) to enable them to deliver protective behaviours work with their students. The protective behaviours process is a practical approach to personal safety, aiming to prevent abuse by helping people to know what to do when they feel unsafe. It constitutes a primary prevention strategy that can be delivered to all students. Rather than young people being held unduly responsible for keeping themselves safe, the programme empowers them to develop personal insight and emotional literacy, as well as empathy and perspective-taking. The latter is perhaps particularly pertinent in the context of peer-on-peer HSB, whereby young people need insight into both how they and others may be feeling and how best to respond to risky and unsafe behaviours. It is a way to support youth-led action to tackle HSB within peer contexts. It is also rights-based and linked to matters of privacy and bodily integrity and autonomy.

Staff provided wholly positive feedback after the training, demonstrating that the course gave staff new insights and strategies, leading to improvements in both school climate and culture.

Bystander Intervention

Bystander Intervention (BI) relates to the power that those present have to influence the outcomes of a situation by challenging and/or supporting the individuals involved. Bystander Intervention can both impact the immediate situation and affect the likelihood of future situations arising.

Bystander education is a skills-based approach that developed from applying the principles of BI theory and teaches how to identify problematic situations, when and how to intervene, and when to involve authority figures.

Given that students in a number of schools demonstrated a desire to be part of solutions to tackle HSB, bystander education offered an opportunity to equip and empower students with new skills and strategies. Delivered to 80 Year 12 students, a six-hour programme created and facilitated by Dr Gill Harrop from the University of Worcester was positively evaluated by participants.

Participatory Relationships and Sex Education

Extensive evidence attests to young people's desire for active and participatory approaches to RSHE, whereby their experiences and existing knowledge is taken seriously. However, the challenge in active and participatory RSHE formats is in ensuring that students feel safe and that educators feel willing and capable of including them to both elicit student contributions and manage classroom discussions.

Having reviewed several of the schools' RSHE curricula and provided guidance on how to increase the participation of students, a teacher training resource, entitled '*Teaching participatory RSHE to transform school cultures*' was developed and piloted. This has received positive evaluations and will be refined and shared with schools during years two and three.

Next steps

All ten year-two schools have been recruited and initial visits are underway. Findings from year two will be shared in March 2024, with a final project report published in March 2025.

1. Introduction

"I was around 12 years old when some of the boys in class started reaching up my skirt in lessons or form time to see how far they could get without a reaction. Then they started trying to undo girls [sic] bras through their shirts whilst sat behind them in lessons. It was a game to them. To this day I'm still not sure if the teachers ever noticed, if they did they never did anything apart from tell the girls to stop making a fuss whilst they were teaching. As far as I'm aware nobody ever reported anything either. I didn't realise that was wrong until 5 years later after having a conversation with some friends who told me that it's not normal. But since the age of 12 that behaviour had been so normalised that I didn't see the wrong in it."

(Testimony submitted to the Everyone's Invited website)

In June 2020, Soma Sara, a young woman then aged 21, shared her experiences of sexual harassment, violence and rape culture on the social media platform Instagram. Within a week, she received 300 replies from people sharing similar experiences, many centring around incidents of HSB that had happened in UK schools and colleges. She set up the website Everyone's Invited to record these testimonies and by June 2021, over 16,500 submissions had been received. That same month, the Everyone's Invited team released a list of over 3,000 UK schools and colleges named in these accounts.

On 10 June 2021, Ofsted published its report on the UK government-mandated rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges (Ofsted, 2021). Working with 32 schools and colleges over a period of eight weeks, inspectors spoke to more than 900 young people to investigate areas such as safeguarding and curriculum, multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and victims' voices and reporting. The report concluded:

"This rapid thematic review has revealed how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people. It is concerning that for some children, incidents are so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them."

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF), via the Stop It Now! helpline, offers support to anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse. Following the launch of Everyone's Invited the helpline experienced a marked increase in education professionals calling, either seeking support in response to specific incidents or for help to equip their staff to deal with harmful attitudes and abusive and harassing behaviours amongst students.

More broadly, the education sector was asking common questions, including:

- why are children and young people experiencing harassment and abuse in school?
- what can be done to put things right?
- how can we prevent more children from experiencing sexual abuse in school?

Since 1993, LFF has supported people affected by HSB so was well placed to respond to calls for support. It is widely acknowledged that the evidence base around HSB in schools is scarce, both in terms of its causes and how best to prevent and respond to it. Additionally, the increased level of responsibility placed upon schools by the Department for Education (2022) to respond to HSB has not yet been matched with an increased availability of resources or guidance.

Aiming to support effective school leadership responses, LFF sought funding to undertake a three-year action research project asking:

- what works to respond to and prevent HSB in schools?
- how can we develop whole-school cultures of resilience so that young people feel safer?

2. Project aims

In September 2021, the KPMG Foundation supported LFF with a charitable grant to undertake an action research project with three main aims:

- make schools safer places for children and young people by preventing HSB
- produce evidence and insights to influence government and education strategy
- help schools to respond well when an incident of HSB occurs

In line with the above aims, the project works towards achieving these four outcomes:

- when an incident of HSB occurs, all those involved are supported well – student, parents and carers, and staff
- schools benefit from the experience of others (specialist organisations, academics and other schools) and have access to resources to support their responses to HSB incidents when they arise
- statutory agencies understand key issues schools face on the ground and provide better support to schools with regard to preventing and tackling HSB
- public dissemination of resources and evidence produced as part of the current project to contribute to the body of knowledge around tackling and responding to HSB in schools

An action research approach to evaluation was developed to achieve these outcomes, whereby generation of themes was grounded in the data and learning from each school was used to benefit the other participating schools. Working with ten secondary schools per year over three years, we will build knowledge of ‘what works’ to support schools to respond to and prevent HSB.

3. Ethical approval and research methods

Ethical approval

As a large proportion of the research participants were and will be young people in schools, it has been essential to take account of their needs and the special ethical considerations that might arise. In applying for ethical approval for this work from both LFF's research committee and the University of Surrey's ethics panel, there was a rigorous research design process.

In line with the guidance by Save The Children (2021) to enable children participation, the current project was designed to ensure that participation is:

- transparent and informative
- voluntary
- respectful
- relevant
- child-friendly
- inclusive
- safe and sensitive to risk
- accountable

Additionally, working with some young people with learning needs, and/or learning/physical disabilities, we considered Plan International's Guidelines for Consulting with Children and Young People with Disabilities (2016).

There was a concern that participating in the project could have a psychological or emotional impact on the participants. To mitigate this risk, an LFF practitioner's contact details were made available for those taking part in case any difficult topics arose, or anyone felt uncomfortable. Procedures were agreed upon with each school whereby any child who wished to withdraw for any reason (and they need not give any reason) was accompanied by a staff member back to their usual or alternative activity. Additionally, the project lead worked closely with each school to identify the pastoral support available in school on a longer-term basis.

Special consideration was given to the particular needs of young people who have been harmed by their peers' sexual behaviour. In line with The United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance To Victims Of Sexual Exploitation And Abuse (2019) we followed the five principles of providing support:

- support was made available to all victims of sexual exploitation and abuse in a manner that is victim-centred, rights-based, age, disability - and gender sensitive, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate
- support would be tailored in the best interests of victims, and provided in a manner consistent with the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- adhering to the principle of "do no harm", where privacy, confidentiality and informed consent were respected
- victims were entitled to pursue applicable accountability measures, including legal redress where desired

School recruitment

Headteacher and stakeholder briefings were widely disseminated to schools by project partners (such as Barnardo's, the Marie Collins Foundation and the Centre for expertise on child sexual abuse). Schools self-selected by contacting the project lead to arrange an initial visit to explore in detail whether they wanted to engage with the project.

Schools within a defined geographical location (West Midlands and its five surrounding counties: Worcestershire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Herefordshire) were recruited, using a project inclusion eligibility matrix which included:

- type of education setting (maintained/academy schools, special/specialist schools, alternative education provision)
- local demographics (rural/suburban/inner-city locations, ethnic mix, socio-economic status)
- self-reported extent of HSB and concerns about HSB (low-level concerns/no specific incidents, moderate-level concerns/small number of reported incidents, high-level concerns/numerous reported incidents)

This matrix was used to ensure a diverse range of schools which were well-distributed across the different criteria. This led to some schools, that expressed an interest in and would have benefitted from the programme, not being selected for the project (for example, where there were too many of the same type of school, or based in the same geographical location). Additional support for schools falling outside of the project remit and for those within the remit but not selected for sample diversity reasons, was developed with our Stop It Now! helpline team, whereby callers can book call-backs with specialist schools' practitioners, offering approximately one to three hours' of free consultancy support. Some of the themes identified across these calls will also feature later in this report.

Participant recruitment took place on two levels – firstly, the recruitment of the research sites (10 schools per year) and then, at the level of students, teachers, school staff, parents and (if the need arose) members of the local community. Using an iterative and inductive process meant that the exact mix of participants emerged as needed in each different context. The process for recruiting these participants is outlined in the informed consent and assent procedure below.

Informed consent and assent

All individual participants (school leaders, school staff, students, parents and members of the local community with a view on HSB in their local school– such as local shop/food outlet owners, residential neighbours of the school, local police and staff from support agencies) were asked for their informed consent to:

- 1) engage with the project
- 2) use their anonymised data for research and resource development

Information and consent forms, appropriate to the needs and different levels of involvement of participants, were designed and sent to all students, staff and parents eligible for participation, offering the right to withdraw consent in any or all project activity. The consent materials were distributed to allow enough time for questions and to ensure participants had at least one day before the planned activity to process the information and consider their participation.

There were varying levels of consent required:

- initial consent to general project involvement from the school's senior leaders
- general information provided to parents or carers that the school is taking part in the project which may involve some whole-class/year lessons, workshops and assemblies. Parents or carers could opt-out on behalf of their child if they wished, otherwise, opt-in consent was inferred, and assent was sought from students during the lesson/workshop/assembly. Practically, this involved LFF staff clearly communicating to students at the start of any activity that their participation was entirely voluntary and they were under no obligation or pressure to engage. We worked closely with school staff to ensure that any student wanting to opt-out of any activity was safely returned back to their usual lesson/school activity
- given that all students we worked with attended secondary schools and were aged 11 – 18 years, their explicit informed consent for any involvement that was more intensive than attendance in a whole-class lesson/workshop (e.g. smaller focus groups, conversations with small groups, individual interviews/interventions and participation in online and offline surveys) was sought
- individual consent from members of staff for classroom observations, interviews/discussions

The research involved three strands: respond/learn/prevent:

Respond:

- Measures of the school's ability to respond to and prevent HSB were collected at baseline, before engagement with the project, to compare against their ability to respond and prevent HSB post-intervention, after their engagement with the project (data collected at end-line). Although end-line data were not made available, baseline data provided useful insights into teachers' and students' confidence, among other things, to address HSB.
- Data were collected across all participant groups to understand the context and circumstances of each school's experiences of HSB informed the design of interventions tailored to each school. This included: focus groups, interviews with individuals, online and offline surveys, and creative workshops/assemblies.
- Interventions were specifically tailored for responding to and preventing HSB.

Learn:

- In the case of specific incidents of HSB in schools which required individual assessments and interventions, notes were taken and analysed to identify themes around risk factors that increase the likelihood of displaying or being exposed to HSB, and the support needs of these students. Signposting to relevant services (internally through LFF or to external agencies) was recorded and analysed to identify where services can help and where there are gaps in provision.
- Early learning was generated regarding the process of consultation of project delivery and needs/concerns when addressing HSB from the first schools supporting project progression.
- Notes taken of every contact with each school (written up after each engagement) and the insights drawn from data analysis formed the basis of the case studies (Section 8). These case studies summarise the learning from each individual school regarding key issues, concerns, gaps in resources/provision and emerging themes.
- Interim reports, of which this is the first, will be disseminated to government and school stakeholders (Ofsted, Department for Education (DfE), Home Office, Education Scotland, National Association of Headteachers (NAHT)) to summarise the learning from the case studies at the end of each year. A final report will be disseminated at the end of the project.
- Insights generated through analysis of case studies will contribute to the ongoing development and updates needed for the RSHE curriculum, especially on the themes of sexual harassment, sexual violence, cyber resilience, pornography and consent.

Prevent:

- The final report will include recommendations for government to strategically influence governmental responses.
- Insights from the current project will inform the adaptation, strengthening and creation of guidance needed to address the prevalence of sexual harm in schools (e.g., Keeping Children Safe In Education)
- Project outputs will involve resources on preventative measures schools can implement to make their communities safer.
- It is intended for resources developed for schools to be shared widely with support from partners (DfE, Ofsted, Home Office).

Interventions

The interventions provided to each school were based upon their emerging needs. After initial meetings to assess the nature of the issues each school faced and to plan a bespoke package, interventions included:

- providing consultation to the school on delivering an appropriate welfare-centred response to all children and families affected, including those harmed and those who have harmed. This involved a range of interventions such as: unpicking the needs of the staffing group, parents and students to restore a sense of safety at their school; advising on effective disclosure routes and signposting to support for anyone affected by HSB; guiding leaders to consider what elements may have contributed to the incident occurring within their specific context

- providing ongoing consultation as staff reviewed their protocols, procedures, and physical environments to make their school community safer
- establishing young people's consultation groups
- developing bespoke packages of training and workshops to meet the individual needs of each school community
- collaborating with schools to jointly provide mediation between students and/or parents who have been affected by specific incidents of HSB and needed support to feel safe again

Data analyses

Quantitative data were collected via two online surveys, one of which was designed for students and the other for staff. Both versions of the survey included 10 questions, with responses recorded on a Likert-type scale (ranging from 0 = never to 4 = always). It was intended for surveys to be distributed at baseline (prior to) and end-line (following the end of) students' and staff engagement with interventions delivered, to explore participants' understandings of HSB, perceptions of school safety, and confidence to address HSB within the context of the school. Quantitative datasets are, however, incomplete as several schools had difficulties in coordinating baseline and end-line survey completion. Available data are limited to baseline student and staff survey data from two schools.

Quantitative data analyses involved the use of descriptive statistics to provide an overview of each school's environment. Inferential statistics were used, when necessary, to further explore patterns in the data.

Qualitative data were analysed using the grounded theory approach, whereby generation of categories and themes was grounded in the data, building up from description to interpretation, attending to the latent and manifest content, i.e., both what participants said and shared, how they constructed their perceptions and experiences, and how they engaged in the research. The coded research notes were supplemented with analytical memos that outline the process by which the categories and themes have been identified and developed.

We approached the data with the knowledge that HSB is both a matter of individual experience and behaviour and wider peer and school dynamics, structures and cultures which may affect awareness, attitudes and behaviours. The analysis focused on participants' perspectives on HSB and its causes within their school contexts and their perspectives on responses to HSB broadly, then specifically in terms of the interventions delivered by LFF in the schools. It thus identified insights about the processes by which HSB occurs and the mechanisms through which prevention strategies and responses to HSB do and do not have impact. Particularly with the young people, we wanted to give voice to participants to challenge assumptions and beliefs about HSB and the best ways of preventing and responding to it, including any unforeseen consequences of well-intentioned efforts by adults. Qualitative document analysis of HSB incident reports, safeguarding and referral policies, and RSHE curriculum plans were also undertaken.

In line with the action research approach, analysis occurred continuously throughout the process of data collection and the emerging insights shaped the interventions delivered and the ongoing data collection methods. It resulted in the role of the researcher undertaking the analysis as active within the process of generating the data, necessitating close work with the project lead. Categories and themes produced as part of the analysis were explored in terms of LFF practitioners' experiences in the field. This process was reflexive and needed to account for dynamics of power and positionality within the institutional environment of the schools as research sites, between participants (adult and young people), and between participants and researcher.

4. School profiles

A broad and diverse range of school settings, locations, sizes and demographics were recruited, assisted by the use of the eligibility matrix.

To protect the anonymity of schools, we have not listed the exact number of students so have categorised school size as:

- Small specialist: under 100 students
- Medium specialist: over 100 students
- Small: under 1000 students
- Medium: 1000 - 1500 students
- Large: Over 1500 students

We have used DfE descriptions of location, adapted from the government's Rural Urban classification system and published on the UK government [website](#).

From the same website, we have used the percentage of children eligible for free school meals (FSM) as an indicator of some of the wider socio-economic demographic factors within the school community. In 2021-22, 22.5% of students across the UK were eligible for free school meals, up from 20.8% in 2021. This represents just under 1.9 million students. Using this as a baseline, we have reported the percentage of students eligible for FSM and indicated whether this is significantly higher ($\geq +20\%$), higher ($\geq +10\%$ and $< +20\%$), approximate to ($\pm 10\%$), lower ($\leq -10\%$ and $> -20\%$) and significantly lower ($\leq -20\%$) than the national measure.

Guidance from the DfE (2018) instructed schools to no longer collect student nationality and country of birth data for the school census from autumn 2018 onwards. It has, therefore, been difficult to find standardised measures of the ethnic diversity of school communities. However, we wanted to ensure that this important demographic information was captured and considered, so we have used ethnic group data from the Census 2021 to look at the ethnic diversity of the borough or county in which the school is located.

This is a blunt measure and might not present a fully accurate picture, but we hope that it gives some indication of the ethnic diversity within and between schools.

For the purposes of this school profile summary, we have used the government's national statistics on schools, students and their characteristics (UK Government, 2022), which indicate that in 2021-22, 34.5% of UK students came from a minority ethnic group (MEG). Using this as a baseline, we have reported the percentage of students from any minority ethnic group and indicated whether this is significantly higher ($\geq +20\%$), higher ($\geq +10\%$ and $< +20\%$), approximate to ($\pm 10\%$), lower ($\leq -10\%$ and $> -20\%$) and significantly lower ($\leq -20\%$) than the national measure.

We categorised the level of HSB concern based on the self-reported issues from school leaders during initial visits. We aimed to compare the level of self-reported concern with staff and student survey results, alongside other measures of incidence, to assess how closely aligned these perceptions were.

School	Setting	Size	Demographics	Level of HB concerns
KPMG01	Co-ed academy with sixth form (11-18)	medium	Urban city & town 18.9% FSM / Approximate to national statistics 10.1% MEG / significantly lower than national statistics	high
KPMG02	Single-sex SEMH special school (11-16)	small specialist	Rural hamlet 53.5% FSM / Significantly higher than national statistics 14.1% MEG/ Significantly lower than national statistics	medium
KPMG03	Co-ed foundation school (11-16)	medium	Urban city & town 8.7% FSM / Lower than national statistics 12.4% MEG / Significantly lower than national statistics	medium
KPMG04	Co-ed faith middle & secondary school (9-18)	medium	Urban city & town 11.3% FSM / Lower than national statistics 14.2 MEG / Significantly lower than national statistics	medium
KPMG05	Single-sex selective grammar school & sixth form (11-18)	small	Urban city & town 2.3% FSM / Significantly lower than national statistics 4.5% MEG / Significantly lower than national statistics	low
KPMG06	Co-ed academy with sixth form (11-19)	medium	Urban major conurbation 48.9% FSM / Significantly higher than national statistics 39.4 MEG / Approximate to national statistics	high
KPMG07	Co-ed all through academy (4-18)	small	Urban major conurbation 74.7% FSM / Significantly higher than national statistics 51.4% MEG / Higher than national statistics	high
KPMG08	Co-ed community special school	medium specialist	Rural hamlet 45.4% FSM / Significantly higher than national statistics 33.8% MEG / Approximate to national statistics	medium
KPMG09	Co-ed alternative provision free school (11-17)	small specialist	Urban city & town 45% FSM / Significantly higher than national statistics 14.1% MEG / Significantly lower than national statistics	high
KPMG10	Co-ed community school (11-16)	small	Major urban conurbation 28.3% FSM/ Approximate to national statistics 14.9% MEG / Lower than national statistics	high

5. Interventions delivered

There were varying degrees of difference between the package of interventions planned and those that were, in fact, successfully delivered. The planned interventions were designed to address the issues that staff, students and/or parents or carers raised during initial school visits. Not all planned interventions were delivered, owing to a range of reasons such as timetabling clashes, school staff absence or the project contact leaving the school, or lack of time to deliver before the project year-end. In almost all schools, there were interventions that were planned but not delivered (represented below as P). A successfully delivered intervention is represented below as D.

The exact nature of the interventions will be discussed in greater depth in the summary case study reports for each school in [Section 7](#).

Activity /school	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
Staff survey	D	D	D	P	P		P		D	P
Student survey	D		D	P	P		P			P
Parent survey				P						
Staff training	P	D	D		P			D	D	D
Staff focus group								D		
Student education	D		D	P	P	P	P			P
Student safety plans						D				P
Student focus group	D		D		D				P	
Parent workshop		P	D	P	P	P	P	P	P	
RSHE curriculum review	D	D	P							
Bespoke resource development	D	D	P		D		D		D	

6. Cross-cutting findings and themes

6.1 Concerns about HSB: The 10 school sites varied in terms of their structure and student composition and regarding their concerns about and perceptions of HSB among and affecting students. Perhaps unsurprisingly because the sites self-selected to be involved in the project, each had a relatively high level of concern albeit with different perspectives on the extent and nature of the problem and the underlying causes to be addressed. These perspectives may, on the one hand, reflect differential cohort and community needs across schools, as well as, on the other, adult-oriented inclinations to frame the issues in particular ways. As elaborated upon below, previous studies identify the ways in which adults may be biased in their understandings of HSB and may, perhaps indirectly and unintentionally, contribute to the contextual and cultural underpinnings of the problem through their own attitudes, beliefs, and (in)action (Lloyd, 2019). Hence, it has been suggested that responding to and tackling HSB in schools requires critical reflection on the part of staff as well as attention to the issues thought to be affecting students (see Radford, 2000). All this means that the data on staff concerns about HSB has been addressed critically and analysed comparatively with the perspectives shared by students and in terms of wider literature on this topic.

6.2 Engagement Plans – ‘School Climate’ and ‘School Culture’: Analysis of engagement plans suggested both commonalities and differences in the issues deemed to be affecting the schools and the agreed course of action regarding interventions across the sites. The data from these plans suggested that elements of ‘school climate’ and ‘school culture’ were identified by school staff during initial visits and aspects of both were referred to regarding intervening to address HSB. School climate refers to matters such as immediate perceptions of safety, as well as willingness to report and intervene (among staff and students). School culture, meanwhile, describes the value systems and norms within the school. School culture may affect the climate (Read et al., 2015) with Fritz and Firmin (2016) identifying that victim-blaming cultures and a normalisation of HSB and underlying attitudes can reduce the likelihood of reporting and intervening in response to incidents. However, it is also important to clearly delineate these two dimensions because improving school climate may not necessarily address underlying cultural causes of HSB and, moreover, the ability to improve school climate may be hampered if the culture is not addressed (e.g., implementation of reporting mechanisms may not be effective if cultural barriers to reporting remain). At the same time, it is also important to place schools within a broader ecosystem that transcends local/immediate climate or culture, with responses to incidents and safeguarding being affected by the quality of multiagency working between schools and other key statutory agencies and voluntary services. While a supportive and well-organised approach is vital, poor coordination and information sharing, differences in approach, and a lack of adequate resources appear to be very damaging.

6.3 Student focus groups: Broadly, concerns raised in student focus groups (KPMG01 and KPMG03) relate to varying perceptions and experiences of safety among participants, constraints on RSHE to address problems due to variation in practice among teachers; perceptions that RSHE is insufficiently reflective of the reality of young people’s lives; young people not trusting or being willing to use available reporting mechanisms within schools; and the desire among young people to be part of identifying problems and developing solutions rather than just being told what to do by adults. For participants, HSB, and feeling unsafe in school, seemed very much a matter of normalised cultural patterns of a continuum of behaviours and, oftentimes implicit attitudes and expectations, that prevent students from feeling comfortable and free and able to be themselves. Gender stereotypes and inequalities were of concern to many and there was some good critical engagement among student participants regarding the underlying causes of HSB across the continuum. Some participants expressed exasperation with how their school was (or was not) addressing and responding to HSB and there was some juxtaposition of a desire for punitive action against perpetrators and a suggestion that it is important that interventions tackle underlying causes and enable individuals to learn and change. Robust reporting and response mechanisms for incidents coupled with relevant and participatory proactive educational interventions are needed from the perspective of participants; yet, it was also strongly apparent that they want to play an active role in identifying problems and developing and implementing solutions and do not want to just be lectured to or told what to do by adults.

6.4 Consistency with other studies on HSB and RSHE: These concerns were mostly consistent with emerging insights from other studies and reviews of HSB among young people in schools and the strengths and limitations of current interventions. These studies include recent work conducted by the NSPCC and SafeLives, as well as an extensive academic review of qualitative and quantitative data about perspectives on and experiences of RSHE among young people and teachers published in the British Medical Journal (Pound et al., 2016; 2017). The DfE has, moreover, commissioned research investigating how schools can respond effectively to HSB and how to design and deliver RSHE that raises young people's awareness about and addresses the causes of HSB.

Recent research by SafeLives with 1,000 students and 60 teachers in secondary schools across England (involving surveys, interviews, and focus groups) identified that substantial proportions of students do not feel confident talking about experiences of abuse, most do not recall having been taught about topics like 'coercive control', and very few describe such education as helpful. LGBT+ participants had particularly negative experiences of RSHE and had very low levels of confidence to talk about unhealthy relationships. Boys reported feeling pressured by gender norms (e.g., regarding emotional expression) and were more likely than girls to consult online sources for information about sex and relationships, with formal RSHE lessons being unhelpful for many of them. Participants valued RSHE but wanted it to be more relevant to their lives and to involve more active and participatory skills-based learning, for example regarding communicating about consent and dealing with relationship breakups. They were concerned about sex being treated as a 'taboo topic' and the delivery of RSHE by teachers who are not trained or are uncomfortable teaching the subject. Teachers, meanwhile, wanted more training and resources and there was evidence of patchy and inconsistent policy and practice across schools.

In November 2022, NSPCC published a report describing a literature review on children's and young people's perspectives on learning about sex and relationships. The report outlines how this learning occurs both formally and informally and that social norms are powerful in shaping learning and may contradict what is formally taught. Online sources of learning are identified as significant but children and young people may lack the skills and knowledge to seek out reliable and helpful information and may feel embarrassed to do so. Perspectives on school-delivered RSHE are deemed lacking by many young people, particularly LGBT+ youth, although consistent across young people is that important topics are covered too late and in insufficient depth. As SafeLives found, the NSPCC literature reviewed for the study showed that youth want RSHE that is directly applicable and relevant to their lives and involves active, participatory and skills-based learning. They want to hear from people with experiences of the topic and for education initiatives to avoid abstinence messaging while providing them with full and holistic information. More specifically, there was an identified need to better address un/healthy relationships and HSB with children and young people and a perception of the 'school culture' regarding normalised acceptance of HSB and the reluctance to 'speak out' as a problem. Challenges included the ability to recognise and communicate abuse, the availability and accessibility of support, not feeling safe to speak out and be supported, and a particular lack of willingness and ability to seek support among LGBT+ youth due to fears regarding their identity being shared.

6.5 Understanding and addressing HSB – perspectives from school engagement plans and student focus groups: Elaborating on the cross-cutting themes from schools regarding the challenges of preventing and responding to HSB, there was a somewhat nuanced appreciation of the contextual causes of HSB, as well as a concern with the practicalities of responding well to the phenomenon, including from a preventative perspective and in terms of individual incidents.

6.6 Causes of HSB: Noted causes of HSB across school engagement plans variously related to matters ranging from emotional dysregulation, experiences of abuse in the home, sexist attitudes and beliefs, peer pressure, poor understandings of consent and healthy/unhealthy relationships, and normalised 'banter' and low-level harassment, among others. Online sexual behaviours were considered a problem in some schools, pertaining to pornography and sexual/nude image sharing in particular. While these issues are probably significant in many contexts, it is also important to identify and reflect on the evidence for the extent to which and how they affect the problem. It is, furthermore, important to avoid adult-centric

definitions and diagnoses of the problem and include students in identifying problems (Lee et al., 2018; Phippen & Street, 2021; Scott et al., 2020). Even where these problems are identified, it is then necessary to take a nuanced and holistic approach that addresses knowledge/awareness, attitudes/beliefs, skills, and emotional literacy regarding both online and offline relationships and sexual behaviours. This approach can be distinguished from more simplistic and reductionist approaches that over-focus on adult-centric concerns and malign young people's perspectives e.g., regarding online sexual cultures.

Some students participating in the focus groups (KMPG01) raised issues affecting them online, but concerns seemed to relate more to the way that online experiences reflect and reinforce wider inequalities and judgments and they wanted these contexts addressed as part of the solution, as opposed to focusing exclusively on the fact that these experiences are happening online. Focus group participants also seemed alive to how HSB (online and offline) can be facilitated by a normalisation of sexist and other problematic beliefs and attitudes, as well as the processes by which different behaviours are judged and rewarded by peers, and that the issues can be exacerbated by incidents going unchallenged. However, this means that there was some optimism among participants that peers can play a positive role in addressing the issues by challenging and changing what is normalised and rewarded. These findings align with literature regarding the need to take a contextualised approach to helping young people feel and be safe in schools that address the spaces and places in which harm takes place and may be normalised (e.g., Firmin, 2020; Lloyd, 2019).

The causes of HSB noted on engagement plans can, perhaps, be understood in terms of the ecosystems of young people's socio-sexual development; strengths-based and social norms-based approaches would focus on helping young people to navigate and make sense of different sources of influence and engage in critical thinking and reflection (see Rogers et al., 2019). The process is, furthermore, not merely cognitive and there are emotional and affective dimensions to address (MacIntyre et al., 2015), which was recognised by several schools and raised by participants in focus groups. According to other studies, these emotional and affective dimensions also relate to pleasure-risk intersections and the fluid and dynamic contexts in which young people experience sex and relationships (e.g., Demant & Heinskou, 2011). In these contexts, rationalistic instruction in matters regarding consent, un/healthy relationships, online dangers, etc. may not reflect the more complex feelings and pressures that young people may be experiencing as they try to navigate risk, reward, pleasure, and harm for themselves and one another, including in potentially coercive, exploitative, or otherwise harmful ways.

The role of gender in understanding the problem of HSB (both its perpetuation and victimisation) was apparent in many schools and students in focus groups were concerned about gender stereotypes, inequalities, and double standards. There is a challenge here in acknowledging disproportionality in perpetration and victimisation rates, while not reifying gender stereotypes and not placing undue or anxiety-provoking levels of responsibility on boys or girls to deal with entrenched systemic social problems regarding these disproportionalities. In fact, students in focus groups seemed quite resistant to this and criticised individualised responses that blame targets of HSB. An emphasis on boys as being at risk of criminalisation in some school engagement plans, while a potentially legitimate concern, may, furthermore, be counterproductive in terms of essentialising their role as initiators of sexual activity, while (perhaps unintentionally) reinforcing the notion that heterosexual dynamics are inherently risky (Setty, 2022). Broader approaches that address what it means for sex and relationships to be safe and ethical for all young people and the various motivations that young people may have to engage in sexual activity may help in these regards (see Carmody, 2005; Lamb, 2010).

6.7 Identifying, reporting, and responding to HSB: In engagement plans, several of the schools emphasised the need to achieve consistency in awareness among students, parents, and school staff about what constitutes HSB and to improve willingness and ability to report and tackle incidents, including through preventative action. Challenges in these regards relate to how, exactly, HSB is conceptualised and the perceptions and definitions that are used as a starting point, including any differences between students and teachers regarding what constitutes HSB and the underlying causes. Some schools seemed to acknowledge the continuum of HSB and were aware that addressing so-called 'lower level' behaviours and

attitudes (e.g., 'sexist banter') is an important part of the solution. However, there was also some indication that while consulting with students and taking student-led action was recognised as important by teachers, there are challenges entailed when students engage in activism and awareness-raising in ways that schools may find difficult to manage and control, for example from a reputational and due process perspective (e.g., KPMG01).

From the young people's perspective (based on student focus groups), reporting HSB seems hampered by cultural implorations against 'snitching' on peers but also by concerns about confidentiality and risks of being judged or the situation being mismanaged by teachers (or, at least, managed in ways that cause problems for students). There was some strong awareness among participants about HSB as ranging along a continuum and lots of concern about normalised lower-level behaviours and attitudes that jeopardise feelings of safety in school. Yet, participants also felt that teachers can be part of the problem, for example regarding judgmental attitudes, sexist attitudes, and an over-focus on girls' dress and behaviour. There was some perception that teachers are not actively addressing or responding to incidents, which reduces students' inclination to do so and, rightly or wrongly, that girls are being sexualised in terms of their clothing and the uniform policy in sexist and unjust ways.

In some school engagement plans, a deficit-model was apparent, whereby students' socio-affective skills and/or family circumstances were considered to be part of the problem of HSB. Likewise, some schools wanted parents to act as partners when tackling HSB, but some engagement plans referred to parents as actually part of the problem if and when they do not consistently reinforce messages from school and/or contradict these messages due to vulnerabilities in the home/family. There is perhaps a need for critical reflection here on the hoped-for role of parents, including role modelling and socio-sexual socialisation, as well as how parents act as a key resource for young people to share concerns and report harmful experiences. In KPMG03, there was some perception among focus group participants that parents can play a positive role in encouraging their children to behave well toward others.

There was also a challenge regarding the distinction between school climate and school culture evident in the data, which has been identified in the literature. Evidence from studies speaks to the extensive social and emotional barriers to reporting abuse and unhealthy relationship behaviours, irrespective of knowledge and awareness (e.g., Fritz & Firmin, 2016; Jorgensen et al., 2018; Project deShame, 2017; Ringrose et al., 2021; Setty & Dobson, 2023). Indeed, some school engagement plans recognised how a desire for inclusion and acceptance among peers can preclude positive action in these regards, which suggests that cultural norms and meanings that shape expected and rewarded behaviour at the peer-group level need addressing. Some students spoke in focus groups about how peers can normalise HSB and associated attitudes and there are differences in perspectives about what is and is not acceptable, but that it can be difficult to challenge the behaviour (especially KPMG01).

The data highlighted the importance of equipping students with the tools, skills, and emotional literacy required for navigating these realities in ways that feel possible and safe for them to do so, consistent with a recognition that adults are unlikely to be able to completely solve the problems in a top-down approach. Wider literature also attests to the limitations of a purely incident-driven approach and the importance of taking preventative action that addresses underlying social and cultural contextual causes of HSB (Lloyd, 2019). The importance of addressing wider contexts relates to how even individual-level and interpersonal incidents of HSB are still often linked to peer meanings, norms, and pressures which shape the 'sexual scripts' (Jackson & Scott, 2010) that, in turn, influence individuals' expectations and choices for themselves and others. The 'private-public' divide in young people's socio-sexual cultures, online and offline, is increasingly blurred (see Naezer & Ringrose, 2018).

Several engagement plans included a concern about preventing and responding effectively to incidents, alongside recognition of the need to address contextual and cultural causes. Students in the focus groups wanted to play an active role and spoke extensively about how interventions need to connect with the realities of their lives and provide them with opportunities for participatory learning and for collaboratively identifying and solving problems. They also wanted these interventions to give them the skills and tools

to address HSB in their peer contexts, as they did not have faith that adults can solve the problems for them. That being said, selection bias may mean that these students had higher levels of awareness about and motivation to address the issues compared to the wider student population. Identifying and solving problems inclusively and in ways that have widespread impact is, therefore, important.

The inter-relationship between responding to and preventing HSB and the unintended consequences that can arise through school interventions needs to be addressed. Research has identified that zero-tolerance and punitive approaches to incidents can be counterproductive because they do not necessarily address underlying causes and may entrench resentment and division, not least because of young people's reluctance to get themselves or peers into trouble, notwithstanding any concerns they may have about HSB (Lloyd & Bradbury, 2022). Some students favoured a more punitive approach than they felt is currently being taken, but this was juxtaposed against a desire for individuals to genuinely learn and change. It seemed that the resort to 'harsher punishment' may have related more to a sense of despondency about behaviours going unchallenged or ineffectively addressed than a genuine belief that such approaches will fully solve the problem. These perspectives also pointed to a need for trauma-informed approaches that recognise the hurt that victims and others may feel about what has happened.

Confidentiality and safeguarding policies and protocols in schools may have exacerbated these issues and prevented ongoing dialogue and openness between students and staff, with ramifications for staff awareness of HSB experiences. Yet, students seemed to want to speak to trusted adults, but it was important to them that they can exercise some control over how disclosures are handled. Another issue related to safeguarding from the school's perspective was identified in the staff focus group in KPMG08. It was evident that staff are dealing with an intensely vulnerable cohort with complex needs but that, while there were some positive perceptions on working with partners, a lot of multiagency safeguarding relationships were poor from the perspective of the school. As identified consistently in the literature, effective multiagency working is hampered by poor communication, differences in working styles, high thresholds, poor staffing and resources, a lack of coordination and information sharing, differences in views about needs and interventions, among other factors (Firmin, 2018). Accounts shared in the focus group indicated that these practical barriers can be highly frustrating but also emotionally challenging because of the desire to safeguard and meet the needs of students and their families.

7. School-level insights and contexts

Readers will notice that the level of school engagement varied widely, as reflected by the differing lengths of the following case study reports. This was mostly owing to constraints around staff availability to facilitate school visits and the completion of planned interventions. In two of the ten schools, contact was lost over the summer holiday, likely due to long-term staff sickness or resignations, and no alternative staff contact could be established. In other schools where contact was successfully maintained, there were other reasons as to why planned interventions could not be delivered before the project year-end, such as timetabling clashes, staff changes and staff sickness, as previously discussed.

7.1 KPMG01

A co-educational academy with sixth form (11-18) and of medium size. Based in an urban city and town, 19% of students received free school meals (approximate to national statistics) and 10% came from a minority ethnic group (significantly lower than national statistics). The school community reported a high level of HSB concerns.

Findings from staff survey

Forty-four members of staff completed the survey. Their median age was 43 (ranging from 22 to 62) and 71% identified as female.

Respondents were reported to overall endorse a statement (high endorsement) if they agreed that the statement applied often or always. Low endorsement was reported if respondents indicated a statement to apply never or rarely. While moderate endorsement was reported if respondents indicated a statement to apply sometimes.

Approximately 82% of staff reported understanding the continuum of sexual behaviours, ranging from healthy to harmful, and 86% endorsed the idea that school staff should support children who display HSB. The majority (68%) identified HSB as a problem within the school some of the time.

In accordance with the above responses, 82% felt equipped to promote respectful and healthy relationships among young people. The majority also agreed that school policies and procedures help staff proactively prevent HSB in school (75%) and respond to incidents of HSB (86%), and that school leadership helps them support the needs of students displaying HSB (71%).

Only 55%, however, reported confidence in dealing with or discussing HSB, with almost one-third reporting confidence in doing so sometimes (32%). Importantly, 39% of staff were not confident in discussing HSB with parents specifically. These contrasting findings might speak to insufficient training. Almost half of staff (48%) agreed that school training only sometimes helps staff support the needs of children displaying HSB.

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to explore this assumption. Confidence to discuss HSB with parents was significantly affected by levels of agreement that school training helps staff to support the needs of children who may be displaying HSB, $H(2) = 9.54$, $p = .008$. Focused comparisons of mean ranks between groups indicated that staff demonstrating low agreement with the statement that school training helps support the needs of children who may be displaying HSB reported significantly lower confidence in discussing HSB with parents compared to staff demonstrating high agreement that school training is helpful (difference = 4.36). Likewise, confidence to deal with or discuss HSB in general was significantly affected by levels of agreement that school training is helpful, $H(2) = 9.94$, $p = .007$. Focused comparisons between groups indicated that staff demonstrating moderate agreement with the statement that school training is helpful reported significantly lower confidence in dealing and discussing HSB in general compared to staff demonstrating high agreement that school training is helpful (difference = 4.34).

Further exploratory analyses, using the Mann-Whitney U test, indicated that female staff reported being significantly less confident in dealing with or discussing HSB in general (Mdn = 2) and in discussing HSB with parents specifically (Mdn = 2) when compared to male staff (Mdn = 3, $U = 72.0$, $p = .003$, $r = .58$; and Mdn = 3, $U = 67.0$, $p = .002$, $r = .61$ respectively).

Student analyses

Students who responded to the survey ($N = 155$) were 12 to 16 years old, with a median age of 14. Approximately 60% of students identified as female and 72% did not consider themselves as having special needs.

The majority of students agreed overall that they know the difference between healthy and harmful sexual behaviours (91%), what respectful and healthy relationships look like (92%), and that they can recognise HSB if they see it (88%). Overall, they reported knowing what to do and who to talk to if they see HSB (73%). Most students (36%) reported feeling safe at school only sometimes, but when considering the overall endorsement of this statement, 44% agreed that school feels safe. Students' endorsement of statements relating to teachers and school staff may account for this finding. Although students reported generally good relationships with teachers (52%), over one-third (34%) reported good relationships only sometimes and considered teachers to know when HSB is happening only sometimes (34%) or, strikingly, never or rarely (35%). Students most frequently considered teachers to be approachable if they want to talk about HSB only sometimes (30%). Students agreed feeling comfortable talking with a member of staff in school if they were worried about HSB sometimes or often at an equal rate (24% respectively). Likewise, a comparable proportion of students endorsed the idea that teachers deal well with reports of HSB sometimes or often (29% and 32% respectively).

In line with the above assumption, Kruskal-Wallis analyses indicated that perceived safety at school was significantly affected by confidence in teachers' ability to deal well with HSB, $H(2) = 25.97$, $p < .001$; by perceptions of teachers as being approachable if students want to talk about HSB, $H(2) = 38.78$, $p < .001$; by levels of agreement that students feel comfortable talking with a member of staff if they are worried about HSB, $H(2) = 13.82$, $p < .001$; and by levels of agreement that relationships between students and teachers are generally good, $H(2) = 68.50$, $p < .001$. Focused comparisons between groups indicated that students feeling less safe at school reported significantly lower confidence in teachers dealing well with HSB compared to students demonstrating moderate (difference = 5.77) and high perceived safety (difference = 6.83); lower confidence in teachers being approachable compared to students demonstrating moderate (difference = 7.10) and high perceived safety (difference = 8.30); lower agreement that students feel comfortable talking with a member of staff when compared to students demonstrating moderate (difference = 4.94) and high perceived safety (difference = 4.73); and lower agreement that relationships between students and teachers are generally good compared to students demonstrating moderate (difference = 5.54) and high perceived safety (difference = 10.99). Students demonstrating moderate perceived safety reported significantly lower agreement that relationships between teachers and students are good compared to students with high perceived safety at school (difference = 8.29).

Awareness of the difference between healthy and harmful sexual behaviours, $H(2) = 10.21$, $p = .006$; awareness of HSB when it is present, $H(2) = 6.54$, $p = 0.038$; perceived safety at school, $H(2) = 8.41$, $p = 0.015$; perceptions of relationships between students and teachers as generally good, $H(2) = 8.90$, $p = 0.012$; and confidence in teachers' ability to deal well with HSB, $H(2) = 7.081$, $p = 0.029$, was significantly affected by special needs status. Focused comparisons between groups indicated that students not identifying as having special needs reported higher confidence in knowing the difference between healthy and harmful sexual behaviour (difference = -4.54) and higher awareness of HSB when it is present (difference = -3.60) compared to students identifying as having special needs. Moreover, students not identifying as having special needs reported higher perceived safety at school (difference = -3.63); higher agreement with the statement that relationships between students and teachers are generally good (difference = -4.01); and higher confidence in teachers' ability to deal well with HSB (difference = -3.71) when compared to students who preferred not to say or did not know whether they have special needs.

Engagement plan: The engagement plan suggested an incident-driven approach, focused on particular issues, but also an awareness and concern about wider contextual causes of HSB. Staff typically seemed quite focused on concerns regarding access to and consumption of pornography (and ensuing effects on student behaviour), sexual image sharing among minors, understandings of and attitudes toward consent, and the specific challenges entailed in working with children with additional needs.

There was some indication that staff felt 'alone' in responding to and tackling HSB because statutory thresholds for referrals are high and services are unfunded. Moreover, many felt that the problem of HSB is deep-rooted and systemic and, therefore, that it is challenging to address in school.

Staff were highly concerned about and committed to tackling HSB and were primarily oriented toward responding to incidents albeit in ways that do not further antagonise problems among students and in the wider school community. There was some acknowledgement that incidents are not always clear-cut regarding harm and responsibility and staff felt that there are different stakeholder interests to manage. The police-school relationship regarding timescales of investigations also seemed important to them. Concerns about pornography were raised by staff who felt that it has become a 'new normal', but whether these perceptions reflect reality cannot be established and student perspectives on the issue may differ. Other concerns included image sharing and consent. Adult-centric perspectives on priority topics and problems may or may not align with what students deem important. It was noteworthy that staff were not confident that their messaging is having an impact. The literature suggests that limited impact is to be expected; students cannot just be told what is and is not acceptable but require interventions that entail active participation and skill development as well as that focus on the wider sociocultural contexts that shape attitudes and behaviour. The 'whole school approach', mentioned by staff, must, furthermore, be genuine and consistent, with evidence suggesting that young people are cognisant of anything deemed hypocritical across policy and practice.

The incident-driven response in this school raises questions regarding whether and to what extent wider cultural and contextual causes of HSB were being addressed; moreover, whether there have been any unintended consequences regarding entrenching any students reluctance to report incidents because of concerns about getting themselves or peers into trouble. Likewise, police involvement, including police presence in school, may be counterproductive for similar reasons. It is noteworthy that students seemed more willing to speak informally with non-teaching staff (e.g., in the café) which aligns with evidence regarding young people's desire for safe, non-judgmental, and supportive spaces where they do not fear escalation. Balancing young people's desire for confidentiality with safeguarding duties and concerns is, therefore, a key challenge.

Staff expressed a view that HSB has escalated and worsened since overhauling the RSHE curriculum after the September 2021 Keeping Children Safe in Education update, which may be a result of increased awareness of and engagement with the issues and hence may be a necessary process. On the other hand, just because something was being done does not mean that it was being done well.

Most interestingly with KPMG01, perhaps, was staff attitudes toward student-led action to raise and challenge HSB. They described an Instagram page hosted by an unidentified student which 'named and shamed' people involved in incidents of HSB, and an HSB manifesto which outlined specific incidents that students felt had not been handled appropriately by school staff. These were troubling to staff even though they appreciated the concerns raised and the desire for students to engage in activism. It is, perhaps, somewhat to be expected that schools would be concerned about how to keep control over the narrative that may unfold as a result of student activism and wider matters of due process, reputation management, and so on. Furthermore, while some academic literature identifies the benefit of student activism (Mendes et al., 2019), there are questions regarding its effectiveness and inclusivity, with some suggesting that it may entrench division.

RSHE curriculum: The curriculum overview for KPMG01 was comprehensive and there were pockets of good practice apparent in the teaching materials. The materials suggested that teaching and learning include

participatory methods and incorporation of digital media and, oftentimes, focuses on skill development as well as the imparting of factual information.

Specific examples of good practice included a balanced and skills-based approach to dealing with online media (year 7); rights-based active citizenship content for 'equality and justice' (year 7); some acknowledgment of the need for 'strategies to deal with problems in a friendship' (year 8); engagement with the factors affecting freedom and capacity to choose regarding consent and practical and skills-based learning for giving and interpreting consent (year 8); myth busting and anti-victim blaming messaging around abuse and inclusion of content regarding why an individual may not leave an abusive relationship or report abuse (year 8); questions about why an individual may behave abusively or disrespectfully to another (year 8); critical engagement with how pornography may affect perceptions and expectations of the self and other (year 9); reflection on beliefs about relationships and how the same behaviour may be defined as healthy or unhealthy and use of case study to explore feelings, behaviours, and thoughts (year 9); comprehensive information about what constitutes abuse (year 9); comprehensive information about what constitutes pornography and reflection on attitudes and beliefs (year 10); integrated approach addressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs about perpetration and experience of abuse (year 10); myth busting about sex and inclusion of content in response to students' requests (year 11).

On the other hand, the curriculum and teaching materials seemed to become increasingly legalistic and factual and less focused on contexts of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours as students progress. Specific examples where practice could be developed included further consideration of the social and cultural barriers to and facilitators of healthy and unhealthy relationships, going beyond just what constitutes these relationships to why people may participate in unhealthy relationships and the social and interpersonal pressures at play. Teaching about consent involved the 'cup of tea' video, which has been heavily critiqued for not addressing matters of ambivalence and ambiguity nor the specificities of sexual consent compared to consent in other contexts. There could also have been consideration as to why people may disregard others' rights to consent and the causes of direct and indirect pressure and a reluctance to refuse unwanted sex. Engaging with such nuances may enable identification of and critical engagement with the flows of power and reward in peer culture which may motivate someone to (intentionally or unintentionally) harm another for personal or social gain. Regarding topics like body image, authenticity etc., there could have been further consideration of not just what is and is not realistic but the very mechanisms through which individuals deem something aspirational or not and the contexts in which value is and is not ascribed to different people. While there is some acknowledgement of barriers to intervening and reporting, these issues could have been discussed more consistently and thoroughly across topics. While the participatory methods align with evidence on best practice, there could have been more about connecting the topics to students' current experiences and life stages as well as preparing them for the future. Solutions to challenges could also have been developed with students. Particularly problematic, perhaps, was the emphasis on shame-based messages in places rather than an ethics and rights-based approach (e.g., image sharing - year 10). Finally, it may also have been beneficial to reconsider just addressing 'online and media' and 'pornography' as distinct topics and instead also incorporating these topics into other relevant parts of the curriculum and reframing 'internet safety and harm' to encompass both risks and opportunities of being online for students. The pornography and body image part of the curriculum was an example of best practice in these regards.

Student focus group: data analysis suggests that participants defined safety in terms of feeling 'relaxed', 'comforted', 'happy', 'calm', and 'secure', which, in turn, enables them to feel confident and able to think and act for themselves. When thinking about feeling safe at school, the issue seemed to relate to student interactions and judgment within the peer group, which may involve peers putting each other down and criticising each other. Such interactions may then act as a form of social regulation because individuals may fear being themselves. It is thus the opposite of feeling empowered and confident and participants described feeling unable to take time to make decisions in these contexts; there was a sense from the data that such contexts feel oppressive because of the risk of being judged or criticised.

'...the feeling of constantly being judged... fear of just being yourself'
'...feeling rushed to make really important decisions'

Data indicated perceptions of ever-present threats, including in informal/unregulated spaces that may be beyond the purview of teachers (e.g., in 'corridors', during 'break' times). These threats were described as 'a bit unpredictable... you never really know what's coming next.'

There seemed to be power dynamics shaping these perceived threats regarding age, size, and popularity:

'...like if they're taller walking up to people'

'...using their kind of social status... the fact that they've got more friends... more friends around them in that moment.'

Bullying and harassment were also described as manifesting online; participants felt that individuals can hide behind anonymity (with some apps enabling anonymity) and can present a different, potentially more unpleasant, self in online spaces than they would offline.

'...people could be really kind in person, but online they think they're never going to be found out so they're really mean.'

'...people have fake accounts'

'...there's certain apps where you can say stuff and it won't show who you are.'

Participants also pinpointed pressures and expectations regarding how individuals should look and act online:

'Especially like on social media, you sort of feel like you need to fit the standards, you need to be this otherwise this is going to happen and no-one's going to like you.'

The pressure to align with expected standards was acute because 'otherwise it's scary that you would be alone.'

Specifically, thinness and passivity being the expected ideal for girls:

'...teenage girls you're expected to be really skinny, really quiet and just a sort of well in a nice way be an absolute pushover and just sort of say yes to everything and not really bat an eye.'

Girls were feeling unable to express themselves online and fearing a 'pile on' of criticism with others perhaps 'twisting' what is said and calling people racist or homophobic. There were hints at perceptions of fractured discourse, mischaracterisation and 'cancel culture' type issues:

'Apparently if you have an opinion, it's harmful, you're not allowed to express opinions.'

'So basically, not voicing your opinions anywhere because it could be turned on you to come out to be like racist, homophobic or anything.'

Again, it seemed linked to position in the peer group and whether the person 'likes you' and so is a 'subjective' process that creates feelings of uncertainty. At the same time, one participant said that girls may be coming under less pressure now and it was unclear whether this perceived change is occurring generally or just as they get older as a cohort.

Participants referred to a 'toxic masculinity vibe' whereby boys and men are expected to be stoic and well-built/muscly: 'men don't cry and have to be muscly and taller than women. If you're seen as different, then you're like a target to other people.' There wasn't any indication of this group having encountered misogynistic 'men's rights activism' or 'incel'-type content online though.

Overall, participants felt that both men and women are being judged. While they said that women may find it somewhat easier to be emotionally honest and open compared to men, they felt that women can still be criticised for doing so; for example, others may say that they are overreacting or being hormonal. A participant said that while it may be commonly assumed that women can be more open, this is not what they see in reality:

'...most statistics say that women express easier, but we also get so much more backlash because we're getting told "oh you're just being...you're overreacting." Or I've heard this one so many times "so you're just on your period" or something like that, and this is an actual issue that were feeling that we're going through, and it feels like it's not being taken seriously enough...'

Men, meanwhile, were thought to be shamed for opening up with people saying that they are 'weak.'

Participants described there being gender 'double standards' at play regarding sexual behaviour with shaming for any transgressions from expected masculine and feminine gender roles, e.g., boys being seen as 'gay' if they express 'a more feminine side', while girls are called a 'slut' for sexual behaviour while 'if it's a man, it's like... "well done".'

They referred to HSB as including verbal harassment, e.g., 'jokes' or 'threats':

'Constant catcalling, commenting on how someone looks in a sexual manner.'

'...using gay as an insult often.'

Some participants described boys making 'sexualised noises' in school where 'they're pretending to have sex and then making those noises up and down the corridors', which they said is 'traumatising.'

Participants said that supposedly jokey comments do not always feel like jokes but are very normalised:

'...jokes that aren't really jokes... like I'm going to shove this up your arse...'

'...it's said in a hahaha way but actually feels quite threatening.'

'There's lots of jokes that are normalised so people will say it regularly or quite openly and people won't bat an eyelid.'

There can also be physical behaviours e.g., between boys 'boys jumping onto other boys' backs and making the joke of sexual harassment...'. The 'joke' here has homophobic undertones according to participants.

Some felt unable to express a lack of consent for HSB and that they may be 'targeted or picked on' if they resist it. There were perceptions of teachers not intervening and a normalisation of sexist comments. Teachers were described as focusing on girls and not challenging sexist behaviour or comments which, in turn, made participants feel unable to challenge it. One participant felt that teachers 'don't bother to sort it out or don't have the time to sit down with the children that are doing it and say it isn't right.'

Some participants were critical of girls being targeted for what they wear and recounted sexualised and victim-blaming comments, including from teachers. E.g.:

'...my form tutor told me this this morning, "be careful walking up the stairs because you don't want boys to get the wrong idea" because my skirt was slightly shorter than normal, and it felt unneeded and it felt like it was just promoting boys will be boys.'

Female participants said that the comments stop them feeling comfortable in themselves and, therefore,

affect their perceptions of safety. They described feeling 'targeted' by the comments. Boys, seemingly, were not being spoken to in these terms about what they wear.

Some girls felt unable to get it right and described being criticised for whatever they do. There was mention of avoiding being a 'chav', although it was not entirely clear what was meant by this label:

'... you want to express yourself, but you don't want to come across a chav, or you try to put your body out there but you just feel comfortable the way you feel, but sometimes you can't do right from wrong. If your skirt's too long you'll get picked on for that, if it's too short then you'll get picked on.'

Participants discussed an 'anonymous' reporting mechanism set up in the school but that it does not feel anonymous to students, so it was not really being used. They felt that this mechanism probably will not work because students fear others finding out they have used it and then targeting them. Such sentiments reflect the above-discussed sociocultural barriers to reporting incidents and concerns.

Posters have been put up challenging so-called 'banter', but participants said that these have mostly been taken down and students have been making 'jokes' about them. A participant said that such posters are ineffective because they are 'not going to change the whole school view, they need to connect with the students to let them know that what they're doing is wrong and that the consequences of what they do will backlash them.'

Participants perceived many teachers to be biased in the way they deliver RSHE and respond to different viewpoints.

'... like without realising it, the teacher's sexist biases can be seen quite obviously...'

Data suggests that the RSHE curriculum content and teaching style were quite conservative in nature, which may intertwine with sexist attitudes among students, as illustrated by this example shared by a participant:

'I have an example because it was a lesson, and we were doing about abortion and one of the boys in my class made a comment "you're a child killer even if it's from rape" and the girl in front said: "but it's rape and it's my body my choice." And the teacher had a go at the girl because she said my body my choice, not the boy saying child killer.'

Participants described students as then feeling unable to express themselves and as worried about particular topics, again underscoring the importance of feeling confident and able to speak up as important to safety. There was a sense that it is not safe to go to teachers for help because of fears of being judged. One participant said if 'one of my friends got sexually harassed or they felt uncomfortable, I probably wouldn't go to a teacher.'

'It's annoying because you can't express your opinions.'

'... if you have a different belief then you completely get shut down by the teachers...'

'...I literally got sent out for being too opinionated.'

For this participant, the teaching style meant they felt they are going to be unable to explore complex topics and, in turn, would be unequipped to deal with any experiences, including of abuse:

'... you cover topics like abortion and stuff. It's like I'm half dreading cover that topic with my teacher because she says: "oh yeah if you're mature enough to have sex then you'll have to deal with the consequences" and it's like, what happens if you get raped? That wasn't your choice to be raped so what happens then, do you just have to deal with it?'

There was, however, some sense that participants wanted teachers to play a role but that teachers must understand the issues and the students' perspectives.

'... [RSHE and RS] are really good subjects if done correctly and if the teacher has a good grasp of what's actually going on in the world.'

They wanted teachers to intervene more and address issues through effective punishment. They also want teachers to allow students to express themselves and explore different opinions and perspectives on topics.

'... allow everyone to voice their opinion... it should be spoken about more and then challenged and then you debate about it...'

To deal with HSB, one participant said that 'instead of trying to fix it all the time' focus on helping students to 'understand [what] we can do', suggesting a student-led approach is preferred.

'Not just turning a blind eye when they see things that are obviously happening like maybe not just having words saying you shouldn't say this.'

'Giving proper punishments.'

They also wanted choice about who deals with incidents whereby 'instead of it being passed from a bunch of different members of staff... it's just a single person that a student trusts or relies on...'

Noteworthy from this focus group was how staff values and judgments were intersecting with student culture. Participants perceived normalised sexism, homophobia and sexual harassment through verbal comments and non-verbal behaviour. They described extensive gender double standards and shaming, which staff may reinforce through their own shaming and victim blaming. Students then were not feeling safe to express themselves and did not want to report things to teachers. There was also seemingly an 'anti-snitch' culture among students and students did not feel safe to call out or challenge HSB themselves.

There were accusations of hypocrisy and inaction on the part of teachers and participants wanted them to be more interventionist. The students did not feel the school is doing enough, hence, perhaps, the action taken by the group of girls described in the engagement plan (the anonymous Instagram account and HSB manifesto).

Overall, it seems that students wanted to feel safe and empowered to deal with problems themselves, secure in the knowledge that teachers understand their perspectives and will challenge behaviours. Therefore, teachers may need to develop a student-centred understanding of the problems and develop their skills in being effective facilitators within contexts like RSHE classrooms. Teachers seem also to need to address any biases and to be alive to the ways in which they may, even unintentionally, reinforce the contextual causes of HSB. What was happening online for students seems to reflect and reinforce wider patterns of inequality and sexism and, therefore, may be better conceived of as part-and-parcel of how students are experiencing the issues rather than as a distinct space or issue.

In this school context, student perspectives suggest that HSB was a cultural issue that transcended but manifested through incidents. Judgment and shame were seemingly experienced as quite oppressive, with these feelings reinforced through a lack of staff intervention and a perpetuation of attitudes by staff.

Bystander education programme:

Bystander training was delivered to 80 Year 12 students by Dr Gill Harrop, from the University of Worcester. The programme was adapted for these students from an existing bystander intervention programme developed by Dr Gill Harrop for the University of Worcester students, which has been delivered since 2016 to thousands of students on campus. The programme for KPMG01 students was delivered in school, in one day over six hours with several breaks. At the end of the session, students were asked to complete an online feedback questionnaire using a QR code on the slides. Thirty-five students completed this.

The responses are shown below:

Students were asked if they thought they were more likely to spot problematic behaviour after attending the sessions:

- 85.7% said Yes (45.7% said Probably Yes and 40% said Definitely Yes)

Students were asked if they thought the session had made them more likely to intervene when they saw problematic behaviour:

- 94.3% said Yes (71.4% said Probably Yes and 22.9% said Definitely Yes)

Students were asked if there was anything that wasn't covered in the session, that they would like to have covered. All but three respondents said no. The three suggestions made for additional topics suggested by these three students were:

- other ways to get help, such as websites where they could seek help anonymously
- more discussion around sexual assault
- more websites for support/help in these situations just in case you don't want to talk to people you know

Students were asked what was the most useful thing that they learned from the sessions. These were:

- how to intervene properly and safely (22.9% said variations on this)
- learning about the law and legal definitions of things e.g. sexual assault (20% said this)
- what it means to be an active bystander
- to always help anyone in a problematic situation
- not to wait for someone else to start helping before you do something
- to notice and be more aware of situations
- knowing that you're probably not the only one feeling uncomfortable in situations
- looking at real-life situations
- learning the impact of just being there for someone and how it can change things a lot
- learning about the influence toxic relationships have on people
- equality between crimes against both men and women
- knowing it affects all sorts of people
- the overall session was useful

Students were asked if they were surprised by anything they had learned in the session. Eleven responded as follows:

- the statistics of abuse in relationships and what they think their peers would do
- the length of a life sentence
- the laws and punishments for the crimes
- how a relationship can become controlling
- people think that gender affects matters in the importance of the situation
- what a bystander was
- only men can rape
- how many people don't usually help in a public space

Finally, they were asked for any additional comments about the session. Thirteen responded as follows:

- it felt too long doing it all in one day, and it would be more effective if it was broken down into shorter sessions (nine students said this)
- more interactive activities where students could get out of their seats would be welcomed (two students said this)
- really informative
- I found it very interesting and useful

normative and acceptable in terms of appearance. Potential areas identified for development include covering not just students' ability to keep themselves safe (e.g., online) but also the ways that they may create unsafety for others through their behaviour; the need to develop skills in acting upon any identification of unhealthy relationships, not just being able to identify the traits; taking a relational and contextual approach to understanding how rights and responsibilities unfold and may be delimited within students' peer cultures; developing emotional intelligence and personal insight; addressing consent through mutual models of reciprocal rights that recognise the barriers and facilitators to meaningful consent in reality; and strengthening skills and ability to cope with rejection and relationships ending. The document located RSHE as an opportunity for students to ask questions, which may either be answered at the time or addressed later individually with students. There could have been further recognition here of how RSHE can be a way of creating dialogue with students when done effectively.

Meeting: A further meeting with KPMG02 staff identified that the needs of this student population were complex; there were significant socio-economic disadvantages affecting students and many have been exposed to abuse within the home. The school faced challenges dealing with a normalisation of abuse and the limited ability of students to identify and act upon healthy and unhealthy relationships. This meeting explored how the school could help students identify the sources of influence over their beliefs, expectations, and attitudes and how these in turn affect their expectations, choices, and behaviours (toward themselves and others). A key challenge for the school was addressing the issues safely, with there often being a requirement for staff to deal with disclosures regarding safeguarding as well as problems with emotional regulation among students, which may manifest in RSHE classrooms on pertinent topics. There was an evident high level of commitment to supporting students, but significant challenges in doing so. The Protective Behaviours training (see below) may be of value in this and similar contexts.

Staff training: Discussions with staff highlighted their awareness of their own attitudes, language and behaviour and how this might affect students, alongside all other elements of students' eco-systems, such as peer culture, family and media. Particular concerns regarding 'toxic masculinity' and 'incel culture' were identified, but ensuing conversations highlighted a desire to reframe these issues in a more positive light. A two-hour twilight training session was delivered to all staff, entitled 'Promoting positive masculinity'. Staff attendance and level of engagement were high, with open reflection on the impact of unconscious bias, gender norms and stereotyping, such as a discussion about the influence of Andrew Tate and other public figures.

Parents' workshop: This did not go ahead as planned but evolved into a wider piece of work with other local schools, organisations such as Children's Social Care, police, youth offending services and parents, looking at the complex nature of the issues KPMG02's students faced and trying to better understand their experiences, strengths and needs. A large community event is planned in October 2023 which will be supported by project staff.

7.3 KPMG03

A co-educational foundation school (11-16) and of medium size. Based in an urban city and town, 8.7% of students received free school meals (lower than national statistics), and 12.4% came from a minority ethnic group (significantly lower than national statistics). The school community reported a moderate level of HSB concerns.

Findings from staff survey

Thirty-nine members of staff completed the survey. Their median age was 41.5 (ranging from 19 to 62), and approximately 80% were female. An equal proportion of staff considered HSB as being a problem within their school rarely or some of the time (41% respectively). The majority (69%) reported understanding overall the continuum of sexual behaviours, and approximately 85% endorsed the idea that school staff should support children who display HSB.

In accordance with the above responses, 72% felt equipped overall to promote respectful and healthy relationships among young people, although 26% did so only sometimes. Only half (51%), however, reported confidence in dealing with or discussing HSB, with over one-third reporting confidence in doing so sometimes (44%). The same proportion of staff felt confident in discussing HSB with parents specifically compared to staff who did not (41% respectively). Similar to KPMG01, teachers' perception of available training potentially accounts for these findings. Most frequently teachers reported that school training only sometimes helps staff support the needs of children displaying HSB (39%), although over half (51%) agreed that school training almost or always helps. At the same time, most teachers agreed that school policies and procedures help staff proactively prevent HSB only sometimes (36%), although 59% overall agreed with this statement. Teachers agreed that school policies and procedure help staff respond to incidents of HSB (74%) and that school leadership helps them support the needs of students displaying HSB (67%).

This assumption was explored via a series of Kruskal-Wallis analyses. Teachers' confidence to discuss HSB with parents was significantly affected by perceptions of school training as helping staff support children that may be displaying HSB, $H(2) = 12.4$, $p = .002$, and by perceptions of school policies and procedures as helping staff to proactively prevent HSB, $H(2) = 10.7$, $p = .005$. Focused comparisons between groups indicated that teachers feeling less confident to discuss HSB with parents reported significantly lower confidence in school training helping support the needs of students displaying HSB (difference = 4.98) and lower confidence in policies as helping staff to proactively prevent HSB (difference = 4.55) compared to teachers reporting high confidence in discussing HSB with parents. Likewise, teachers' confidence to deal with or discuss HSB in general was significantly affected by perceptions of school training as helping staff support children that may be displaying HSB, $H(2) = 8.66$, $p = .013$, and by perceptions of school policies and procedures as helping staff to proactively prevent HSB, $H(2) = 22.25$, $p < .001$. Focused comparisons between groups indicated that teachers demonstrating low confidence in dealing with or discussing HSB in general and those demonstrating moderate confidence in this area reported significantly lower confidence in school policies and procedures as helping staff to proactively prevent HSB when compared to teachers demonstrating high levels of confidence in school policies and procedures (difference = 5.28 and difference = 6.21 respectively). Finally, teachers demonstrating moderate confidence in dealing with or discussing HSB in general reported significantly lower confidence in school training as helping staff support the needs of students with HSB when compared to staff with high levels of confidence in dealing or discussing HSB (difference = 3.81).

Mann-Whitney U tests indicated that female staff were significantly less confident in discussing HSB with parents (Mdn = 1) and demonstrated lower endorsement of school leadership as helping them support the needs of children displaying HSB (Mdn = 3) compared to male colleagues (Mdn = 3, $U = 55.0$, $p = .01$, $r = .56$; and Mdn = 3, $U = 72.0$, $p = .031$, $r = .42$ respectively).

Student analyses

Students who responded to the survey ($N = 102$) were 12 to 16 years old, with a median age of 13. Approximately 51% identified as female and 42% as male, and 75% did not consider themselves as having special needs.

The majority of students agreed overall that they know the difference between healthy and harmful sexual behaviours (84%), what respectful and healthy relationships look like (83%), and that they can recognise HSB if they see it (86%). Overall, they indicated they know what to do and who to talk to if they see HSB (73%).

Most frequently, students reported feeling safe at school only sometimes (33%), although when considering overall endorsement of this statement, 50% agreed that school feels safe. This finding can be considered against students' perceptions relating to the availability of support. Most students (29%) considered teachers to always deal well with reports of HSB, although a comparable proportion considered this to be the case only sometimes (27%). Approximately 70% thought teachers know when HSB is happening sometimes, rarely or never. Most students considered relationships between teachers and students to be generally good sometimes (40%), although 50% overall agreed with the statement that relationships are good. Almost half of the students (48%) considered teachers to be approachable if they want to talk about HSB sometimes, rarely or never, while 54% felt comfortable talking with a member of staff if they are worried about HSB sometimes, rarely, or never.

Kruskal-Wallis analyses indicated that perceived safety at school was significantly affected by confidence in teachers' ability to deal well with HSB, $H(2) = 13.5$, $p = .001$; by confidence in teachers being aware when HSB happening, $H(2) = 21.0$, $p < .001$; by perceptions of teachers as being approachable if students want to talk about HSB, $H(2) = 16.4$, $p < .001$; by levels of agreement that students feel comfortable talking with a member of staff if they are worried about HSB, $H(2) = 11.3$, $p = .004$; and by levels of agreement that relationships between students and teachers are generally good, $H(2) = 31.9$, $p < .001$. Focused comparisons between groups indicated that students feeling less safe at school reported significantly lower agreement that relationships between teachers and students are good compared to students demonstrating moderate (difference = 3.37) and high perceived safety (difference = 6.82); lower agreement that students feel comfortable talking with a member of staff when compared to students demonstrating high perceived safety (difference = 4.70); lower confidence that teachers know when HSB is happening compared to students demonstrating moderate (difference = 4.73) and high perceived safety (difference = 6.17); lower agreement that teachers are approachable if students want to talk about HSB compared to students with high perceived safety (difference = 5.50); and lower confidence that teachers deal well with HSB compared to students with high perceived safety (difference = 4.80). Moreover, students demonstrating moderate perceived safety report lower agreement that there are good relationships between students and teachers when compared to students with high perceived safety at school (difference = 6.18).

Mann-Whitney U tests indicated that female students demonstrated significantly lower agreement that teachers deal well with reports of HSB (Mdn = 2) and that they know when HSB is taking place (Mdn = 2) compared to male students (Mdn = 3, $U = 696$, $p = .033$, $r = .24$; and Mdn = 2, $U = 824$, $p = .019$, $r = .26$ respectively).

Kruskal-Wallis analyses indicated that agreement that school is a safe place, $H(2) = 22.45$, $p < .001$, and that relationships between teachers and students are good, $H(2) = 18.55$, $p < .001$, were significantly affected by special needs status. Focused comparisons between groups indicated that students not identifying as having special needs reported higher perceived safety at school compared to students who identified as having special needs (difference = -5.29) and students who preferred not to say or did not know whether they have special needs (difference = -4.70). Students not identifying as having special needs reported higher agreement that teachers and students have good relationships compared to students identifying as having special needs (difference = -5.80). And finally, students identifying as having special needs demonstrated lower agreement that relationships between teachers and students are good compared to students who preferred not to say or did not know whether they have special needs (difference = 4.11).

Engagement plan: The engagement plan suggests that the school felt that it must be seen to be addressing HSB and that achieving buy-in from staff and students is important. There was mention of the need for a 'shared vocabulary' around HSB, alongside which it is perhaps also important to develop a shared understanding of why it is important to address HSB and how best to do so. This school specifically referred to the Ofsted inspection regime and evidencing 'all the work that has been done around HSB', raising

questions as to what this work involved and the way the school was responding to Ofsted requirements and standards.

The engagement plan also emphasised school climate and responses to HSB, with a particular focus on student confidence to identify, report, and respond to HSB. The wider literature suggests that reporting is affected by various factors that may act as barriers to or facilitators of students' ability and willingness to report. These factors are as much social and cultural as they are process- and awareness-related. There are also broader questions regarding whether improving reporting rates and responses will fully address HSB and other relevant preventative action required including skills-based learning for students to solve problems themselves.

Student focus group: Compared to KPMG01, it seemed a bit harder for these students to visualise a safe space, although they were able to identify how it feels to be in a safe space. It entails feeling 'secure', 'happy', 'calm', not having anything to worry about, and, like KPMG01, feeling 'comfortable' - 'at one with yourself' - and able to be themselves.

Participants seemed to look to teachers to feel safe and described teachers as there to 'guide' them but 'if they're not doing that then it can make you feel less safe.' Generally, they felt safe in school although there was a perception that some people may not feel safe, e.g., if they have a 'falling out' with peers or have problems at home and 'stuff could carry on into school.'

'Personally, I don't really think I feel unsafe at school.'

'Bullying', 'prejudice', and 'discrimination' - including racism, sexism, and homophobia - were identified as making people feel unsafe. Disability was also mentioned as something that can cause a person to be picked on for being different. Participants felt that targeting disability is unfair as there is nothing a person can do about it.

They described seeing discrimination affecting students in their school and it may be one-off or repeated:

'I think for some people it is an everyday thing because it's like repetitive like what they've been saying and then other times it can just be like one thing one day and then it's just dropped or something.'

Participants noted the wider 'community' and 'area outside the school' as affecting feelings of safety, e.g., regarding crime.

They described HSB as about actions and words, including threats and coercion. The harms may be physical but also 'mental' and 'emotional.' Mentioned were 'sexual acts that would hurt people, so like rape and stuff like that' but also 'stuff that could be used against people with malicious intent' e.g., 'words mainly against females to put them down.'

Specific examples included sexist language toward girls. Participants felt that boys may also experience sexism and that it is 'a lot' but that it is more normalised:

'For example, if you tell a boy to man up, that would be looked at as sexist, but like it's just normal... it is normalised.'

Sexism was deemed regular and normalised and as having indirect effects on people's attitudes and the general atmosphere within the school. One said 'it's more likely the attitude towards people I think more than words' and can include 'people that you can just see that they look down on your... you're not as good because of your sex or gender.'

Like those in KPMG01, participants bemoaned the tendency for teachers to comment on girls' clothes. They said that the comments are not specifically about the uniform policy but also how girls' clothing may make people feel, which makes girls feel uncomfortable in themselves. Participants felt that these

comments are wrong. A boy said that girls may be told that their trousers are 'too tight', for example, but that if he 'came in in skin-tight trousers I wouldn't get targeted.'

'...we should be able to wear what we want but of course like as long as it's appropriate length. But we shouldn't be worried that somebody is going to look up our skirts or make a comment about what we're wearing anyway.'

From the perspective of participants, the comments seemed to come mostly from teachers but also potentially from boys toward girls. There were other aspects of the uniform policy that felt restrictive to participants, but that it was not necessarily sexualised in nature:

'Most of the time it's like you're not using the uniform policy, it's distracting other students or other teachers and that shouldn't really been mentioned, it should just be uniform rather than how it affects other people.'

There was some willingness among participants to speak to trusted people about their concerns, including teachers but also friends.

Like KPMG01, participants described a general reluctance to use an anonymous reporting mechanism due to low confidence about its anonymity which, they said, is because the person reading the report can see the email address of who submitted it.

Some said that students can feel embarrassed or ashamed to open up and can blame themselves. There were also some reported difficulties in expressing themselves in writing and a desire to talk in person where there is less room for misinterpretation. Participants were also unclear about what happens after making a report and that next steps are clearer when speaking to someone in person:

'People might feel embarrassed or ashamed that they have to use it to express how they feel, about what they're experiencing and stuff and so people find it hard to open up to a person face-to-face and they might feel like maybe it's their fault or it's just like embarrassing.'

'Some people can't write down what they're feeling or what they're thinking or maybe they feel that whoever is receiving this isn't going to interpret it the way that they are feeling it, so they could get... because over an email you can't really tell what's happening but face-to-face you can see the emotions you know what's happening even if you use the same words it can be perceived completely different.'

Overall, they felt that talking about issues is important but that it requires finding a person they trust:

'Yeah, there is a pastoral team, but some people can be intimidating, so it's better to, especially for a situation so serious, it's better to go to an adult you trust personally. Not necessarily an adult but a friend you trust personally to get what you want off your chest.'

Some felt that there is less stigma and more openness about HSB now than in the past and they recommended that people share their experiences:

'It's not worth keeping it quiet. It gets worse if you don't talk about it, that's the main advice...speak to someone. Like if it happened to one of my friends, I'd tell them to speak to me or a trusted adult because it is important to speak.'

'I think it's better now if someone experienced it they probably would feel more comfortable speaking about it because there's less stigma around it now.'

However, there was some sense that it is easier to talk to peers than adults:

'I think more people our age talk to their mates and then their mates will like guide them to who they feel comfortable speaking to.'

Like KPMG01, they wanted clear punishments for HSB and did not feel that current punishments are working. One recommended a 'harsher policy on bullying' and that current punishments like one-hour after-school detentions do not work because the person 'doesn't care about it, it just goes off his back... it's really hurtful for the people who've experienced it... that he's still doing it to other people...'. They recommended 'excluding them permanently' or taking away 'privileges.'

They also felt that individuals need to learn about what is right and wrong and how people feel, develop empathy and skills in perspective taking. One said that 'they just have to sit on a chair for half an hour' and 'don't learn from their actions... so I think we need to rethink the punishments...'. Later it was said that 'you're not helping the person learn how what they're doing could affect someone badly and how it affects them.' A participant recommended talking to people and building a relationship whereby you help them 'realise this person is a person like me, like how they're making me feel, how I'm making them feel; like is it how I would want to feel? You would realise and grow up a little bit so you would realise what you're doing to that person, if it was happening to you, you wouldn't like it.'

There was also a desire for students to come together to actively create change and to intervene and challenge HSB themselves where 'students work together to stop it... like a body of students with each other [rather than] against each other', but there was some fatalism about whether bullying will ever stop:

'...I think if students stood up with each other, like so it starts with students if somebody is getting bullied and you see that it should be stopped it should be stopped by students. If everyone stands up and sees somebody is getting bullied and says "nah that's wrong" then it wouldn't happen as much. I think bullying happens in every school though, it's always going to happen.'

There was some awareness here that students have the power to change what is rewarded in peer culture:

'I think if every student knew that they need to stand up for what's right then it won't be as popular' implying that behaviours become normalised when deemed to be generally accepted, rewarding, and even celebrated, by peers.

They wanted more conversation-based and participatory RSHE and disliked just being told things:

'I feel that in PSHE lessons it's pretty much the teachers just read things off the board to you, but I think that it would improve the experience and the learning in the lesson if it was more of a conversation between the students and the teacher and that they brought ideas in... I feel like that should be the whole thing instead of it just being read out and you just listening, it should be a conversation and it perhaps should be more in-depth and not just like skimming over things.'

The participant felt that these conversations should be:

'...about why they think people do it and what they think should happen, so that people can understand the consequences of if they bully someone or what would happen if they were being bullied and they don't report it.'

This approach was also deemed to help address how 'naturally some people could dominate... so it's about like just making sure people know how their behaviour affects others and how it would affect them...'. They recalled having received lessons on HSB and how to deal with it. These lessons were described as often important but as quickly forgotten. They described wanting more opportunities to reflect on the issues.

'...some of the topics that we learn about are quite deep, so I think it just makes people think but when they leave that door, they completely forget about it. So, I think there needs to be a way, I don't know, that people can reflect on it a little bit more. Because in the classroom we do reflect on it and people do sometimes have conversations about how it could be stopped and stuff, but as soon as we leave the building it just goes out of our heads.'

They also wanted PSHE to be less abstract and more connected to the issues that are affecting them so that it feels relevant, and they can act on what they are learning. One said that it should be 'more personalised to what is actually happening at the moment... that will make you think, oh this is happening around me, it's important and then you'll start to see a change.' They did not want it to feel too individually personal but just generally relevant to them. There was some sense that teachers bringing in their personal perspective could make people feel 'uncomfortable' or a 'bit strange' but may also be inspiring if the 'teacher felt comfortable talking about themselves... it's this person who they look up to or that's put in charge of them, it happened to them, or... how they feel about a certain thing and it might help you to understand in a better way or understand that it could happen to anyone, that could happen to you.'

Participants perceived external organisations to have more knowledge and expertise but even then, the teaching methods may not always be active and participatory. They wanted to learn from 'real life' examples and also all forms of HSB - 'showing all ends of the spectrum' - not just 'extreme' examples.

Finally, parents were described as potentially influential in guiding their children, e.g., 'If that student is bullying somebody the parents might be able to help them talk to them because they might be able to make them change but in a good way.'

It is noteworthy that similar themes were identified regarding the role of teachers in feeding into the culture through comments they make. The emphasis on punishment among participants (as in KPMG01) suggests an incident-focused outlook but also maybe some despondency about normalised HSB. It seems, furthermore, that participants also wanted active, participatory, and relevant learning about the broader issues and skill development to tackle underlying causes. They did not just want to be told what to do but also to engage themselves with the issues and create change as active agents.

Staff, student and parent workshops: There were current and historic events affecting this school's local community which staff requested were addressed in a three-pronged approach, sharing similar messages with staff, students and parents, so that a shared terminology and understanding could be established. A 45-minute 'curriculum enhancement' session was delivered to all Year 7, 8, 9 and 10 students during a themed 'drop-down' day where students were taken off usual timetables to focus on specific issues. The session entitled 'Understanding grooming, exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour' was then repeated in a modified version for an in-person parents' workshop, and an in-person twilight training session for staff.

Verbal feedback from these sessions was positive, though parental attendance at the workshop was low.

7.4 KPMG04

Co-educational middle and secondary faith schools (9-16) and of medium size. Based in an urban city and town, 8.7% of students received free school meals (lower than national statistics), and 12.4% came from a minority ethnic group (significantly lower than national statistics). The school community reported a moderate level of HSB concerns.

Engagement plan: The engagement plan indicates that staff were concerned about a range of behaviours across a continuum of HSB, including 'sexist banter' and 'grooming', to then broader issues e.g., regarding consent. The school wished to address sexualised language among students and a whole school assembly was suggested, although evidence indicates that assembly approaches can have limited impact and effectiveness (Ringrose et al., 2021) and, moreover, that addressing issues like sexualised language involves deconstructing the wider normative peer contexts at play through participatory methods.

Emphasis was placed on 'extended immaturity' after lockdown which was, presumably, affecting socio-affective skills and behaviours in peer relationships. This perception regarding the effects of lockdown is evidenced elsewhere (Setty & Dobson, 2022). The proposed curriculum review in KPMG04 had perhaps been made more challenging by the post-lockdown context and associated stalled 'transitions.'

Mention was made of a workshop for parents regarding concerns about talking to their children about sex and relationships (consent, porn, nudes, etc.) and a 'practical approach to online safety.' Unfortunately, this did not go ahead as a key member of staff left the school in the summer, and another contact could not be established. Another key member of staff unfortunately experienced long-term sickness absence so interventions could not be delivered as planned.

7.5 KPMG05

A single-sex selective grammar school with sixth-form (11-18) and of small size. Based in an urban city and town, approximately 2.3% of students received free school meals (significantly lower than national statistics), and 4.5% came from a minority ethnic group (significantly lower than national statistics). The school community reported a low level of HSB concerns.

Engagement plan: At this all-girls school, similar issues were raised in the engagement plan as in KPMG02 regarding the lack of opportunities for socio-sexual development through regular and informal interactions with the opposite sex. The plan spoke to the issue of the disconnect between knowledge, skills, norms, and, in turn, behaviour. The school seemed to believe that the girls know, in theory, what to say about HSB and have the potential to identify the problem but that there are socio-affective barriers entailed for the girls in doing so in reality. The point about parents 'othering' the issue was pertinent in this context because it may obscure the nature of HSB as operating along a continuum and the different ways in which girls are affected, potentially as bystanders or witnesses, not just as direct targets or victims. It seems from the plan that parents needed to be supported to identify, as well as learn how to address, these complexities with their children. 'Bystander intervention' was noted as important and wider evidence suggests that it is important to take a social norms approach to equipping young people with the tools and skills they need for intervening safely in their peer contexts.

Student focus group: a group of approximately 40 students who are part of this school's 'Change Committee' looked at the draft engagement plan and fed back their thoughts on content and format. Unfortunately, technical issues prevented this session from being audio-recorded, but photographs of the student's notes on the plans are reproduced in the tables below.

Feedback from Group 1

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students being harmed in situations with boys/sexual relationships

Students' comments:

- ☞ can also be friendships
- ☞ not limited to boys
- ☞ girls may not realise in a female-female relationship as it is not as widely talked about
- ☞ when it is a girl that is the problem, it may not be taken as seriously
- ☞ harmful statement as what if they are in a relationship with a girl?

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students don't always stand up for each other in harmful situations

Students' comments:

- ☞ emotional or physical

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Single-sex school doesn't allow everyday opportunities to practice skills/build resilience in relationships with boys

Students' comments:

- ☞ not necessarily the environment but the education
- ☞ can be safe environment and bubble/sheltered
- ☞ depends on school and students
- ☞ might know boys separately so not always applicable

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students know what to say in school but not always what to do outside school

Students' comments:

- ☞ especially sometimes with WHO to go to

Feedback from Group 2**Issue as identified at engagement plan:**

Students being harmed in situations with boys/sexual relationships

Students' comments:

- ☞ aren't really taught how to respectfully interact with women
- ☞ are these issues being addressed in boys' schools too? Avoid victim-blaming
- ☞ students within girls' schools might not be exposed to the same levels of misogyny, therefore, don't know how to deal with it in the wider world
- ☞ emotional /physical
- ☞ not just boys, not just sexual relationships. Can be friendships. How to deal with toxic friends?

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students don't always stand up for each other in harmful situations

Students' comments:

- ☞ don't know when to e.g learning disabilities

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Single-sex school doesn't allow everyday opportunities to practice skills/build resilience in relationships with boys

Students' comments: N/A

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students know what to say in school but not always what to do outside school

Students' comments: N/A

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students' need for external validation/acceptance

Students' comments:

- ☞ EXAM RESULTS!

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Competitiveness/fear of making mistakes looking to each other for mental health first aid

Students' comments

- ☞ more perfectionism
- ☞ it's natural to go to friends as they are trusted & caring but encourage seeking professional/adult help if serious

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Anxiety, mental health & wellbeing issues

Students' comments

- ☞ catching early signs, highlight that there are bad periods
- ☞ help with small things without making it big

Feedback from Group 3**Issue as identified at engagement plan:**

Students being harmed in situations with boys/sexual relationships

Students' comments:

- ☞ this could stereotype boys. When boys are victims they may not be taken seriously
- ☞ sexual relationships with anyone should be looked at
- ☞ how do you get out of toxic friendships?

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students don't always stand up for each other in harmful situations

Students' comments:

- ☞ do we fully understand what a harmful situation is?

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Single-sex school doesn't allow everyday opportunities to practice skills/build resilience in relationships with boys

Students' comments:

- ☞ We are sheltered from misogyny. We still need to be aware of how we experience it
- ☞ Suggest using the word confidence rather than resilience
- ☞ Are boy's schools presented with empowered women?

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students know what to say in school but not always what to do outside school

Students comments: N/A

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Students' need for external validation/acceptance

Students' comments:

- ☞ intimidation & fear. Stigma
- ☞ echo chamber

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Competitiveness/fear of making mistakes looking to each other for mental health first aid

Students' comments: N/A

- ☞ more perfectionism
- ☞ it's natural to go to friends as they are trusted & caring but encourage seeking professional/adult help if serious

Issue as identified at engagement plan:

Anxiety, mental health & wellbeing issues

Students' comments

- ☞ need toolkits or resources and support
- ☞ need it to stop feeling massive

Students also raised topics such as the needs of students who were home-schooled, which had never been raised before and demonstrated a concern for all of their peers, particularly those who experience barriers to accessing support. They were keen that boys should not be stereotyped and that the harm that can be experienced in relationships between all genders should be equally explored.

The discussion concluded with an explanation of the bystander education programme that had been delivered in KPMG01 and a discussion about whether students felt that this would be an effective way to address some of the issues raised. The students were all positive and welcoming of this programme, but unfortunately, timetabling difficulties meant that this could not be delivered in time for inclusion in this report. However, it will be delivered in year 2 of the project.

7.6 KPMG06

A co-educational academy with sixth form (11-18) and of medium size. Based in an urban major conurbation, 48.9% of students received free school meals (significantly higher than national statistics), and 39.4% came from a minority ethnic group (approximate to national statistics). The school community reported a high level of HSB concerns.

Engagement plan: This brief engagement plan indicates a concern with particular incidents but also the wider continuum of HSB, with this continuum perhaps not being recognised by all students and parents. Communication was lost with the main two contacts in this school after the summer holidays, with it being likely that one or both of them resigned or were off sick. Attempts were made to establish new contacts within the school but no response was received. Individual student safety planning work was offered to the school via a third party (a social worker) who had introduced the school to the project staff, but this has not been taken up.

7.7 KPMG07

A co-educational all-through academy with sixth form (4-18) and of small size. Based in an urban major conurbation, 74.7% of students received free school meals (significantly higher than national statistics), and 51.4% came from a minority ethnic group (higher than national statistics). The school community reported a high level of HSB concerns.

Engagement plan: This school catered to a particularly 'vulnerable' cohort of students. A serious incident of HSB seemed to have intertwined with pre-existing vulnerabilities and concerns to have created a particularly problematic situation within the school. The 'solution' here was likely to be complex, while the 'barriers' to implementation may also have been extensive and related to wider contextual issues. Similarly to KPMG06, communication with the two named contacts was lost over the summer, seemingly neither member of staff returned to school in September. However, the reflective worksheets requested for one-to-one work with students, after an incident of HSB, were designed and sent to the school. In the absence of feedback, they have been tested with other schools and are discussed in more depth in [section 9](#).

7.8 KPMG08

A co-educational community special school (11-16) and of medium size. Based in a rural hamlet, 45.4% of students received free school meals (significantly higher than national statistics), and 33.8% came from a minority ethnic group (approximate to national statistics). The school community reported a moderate level of HSB concerns.

Engagement plan: The student cohort in this school also seemed to have some specific vulnerabilities and needs. A point made about 'desperation for friends' in the engagement plan aligns with wider literature on how unhealthy, abusive, or otherwise problematic relationships can exist because of a desire for peer inclusion and acceptance which may lead to tolerance of the behaviours and/or a process whereby the behaviours are re-defined as positive, for example, if seen as about love or care (Barter et al, 2009). The engagement plan indicates that the problem of HSB was predominantly framed in terms of incidents and student deficits (e.g., a desire for friends, emotional dysregulation). Concerns were raised about parents and multiagency working, suggesting that the school saw itself as part of a stakeholder network and as needing to work in partnership with parents and other agencies but that adverse experiences among parents may have been acting as a barrier to effective parent-school partnerships. A description of systems as 'broken' was also pertinent.

Staff focus group: Data from the focus group with the Headteacher, Attendance and Inclusion Officer, and Assistant Headteacher underscored the challenge in the school regarding responding to safeguarding concerns on a daily basis and managing stakeholder perspectives, including anxieties that may be felt by parents. The Headteacher described this aspect of the job as taking 'at least an hour a day, if not a little bit more', while the Attendance and Inclusion Officer described safeguarding as the entirety of the role. While participants felt that some external agencies with whom they work are supportive and effective and can help with signposting, there were some concerns expressed regarding the challenges of working with some agencies, e.g., regarding poor levels of support, not feeling listened to and needing to repeat explanations to different people, feeling criticised, different approaches to investigating cases and gathering information, different perceptions of the seriousness of cases, and different perspectives regarding the needs of and best course of action for a young person and their family. The account provided by the Attendance and Inclusion Officer indicated that sometimes there can be significant struggles with external agencies, which may have jeopardised the quality of the relationship between the school and families and was making them feel 'undermined', e.g.:

'...instead of getting any support the young person and family, I think it actually didn't make things better at all. The young person did not get the support and the family didn't feel listened to and it didn't move on at all.'

There was some suggestion that relationships with the voluntary sector may be better than with statutory services and the latter may be hampered in recent years due to extensive caseloads and staff turnover, with some social workers being 'out of their depth' to deal with 'the level of need of our students, due to their complex needs due to their autism' (Headteacher). 'Waiting lists' and 'thresholds' for statutory services support were also of concern, with the Headteacher perceiving: 'an inconsistency of thresholds, everyone's just firefighting the issues they have, then you're frustrated because you think they need the help right now, and they're not getting it.' The Attendance and Inclusion Officer added that issues around the ordering of meetings and input into assessments may mean that families are engaged with by services for an assessment without including the school, which can reduce the accuracy of the assessment, e.g., if the 'parent isn't able to voice it [the information], or they've not understood the procedures...' It seems, here, that participants consider themselves well-placed to understand the needs and challenges affecting young people and families but that they may be side-lined in reality. Such perspectives were also shared regarding perceptions that initiatives to support families may not always be appropriate and may be disempowering for families.

The Headteacher, however, explained that some processes have improved e.g., for accessing 'early help' because they have an 'early help access coordinator' now whereas previous issues around thresholds for the Multiagency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) meant that getting 'support by early help' required the school 'catastrophising something that wasn't really that bad, just to get it taken on board and cascaded down to get the support.'

Navigating the complexities of multiagency working seemed to require pushing back and being bold, with the Headteacher stating that they are 'quite bolshy', for example, if they are asked by MASH to 'hold' cases that do not meet the thresholds. They will be honest and push back against this and will explain to families if it is 'ineffective if we hold it', while encouraging 'them to try and get the support they can.' Empowering and advocating for parents and families seemed, however, to be challenging with staff at the school wanting to do their best in strained circumstances. The Headteacher recounted an example of having to help a parent navigate the complexities of the system and the people involved:

'... there's a child who used to be here who now works in a shop, mum had difficulties and had loads of different people, no one was really helping her. So, I created this sheet, I asked them all for a photo, and I put their photo, their name and their number and what role they do, so mum could - she was dealing with so many different people - she didn't know who she was dealing with. But no-one would guide her.'

Participants praised their working relationship with their early help coordinator though, as well as another noted partner who they described as not imposing 'loopholes' and instead 'does work with our families and has been really support as well' (Attendance and Inclusion Officer).

An example of a case that brought to life both the practical and emotional aspects of multiagency safeguarding related to a boy who was sectioned with the issue first being about HSB and sexualised behaviour. The Headteacher felt that social services were mainly focused on 'dealing with the parent's needs and not the young person's needs' and 'didn't have the skills or experience to manage such a complex case.' There were problems with 'neglect and maybe even worse things than that [sexual abuse]' in the home and the 'young person has now been diagnosed with catatonia as a result of possibly significant trauma experience.' The school had first raised concerns 18 months prior but 'trying to get [the problem] recognised by professionals - we talked about escalating it - was really difficult.' The Attendance and Inclusion Officer recounted poor communication, information sharing, and organisation between agencies and a missed opportunity for intervening sooner. Managing the needs of the family was complex for the school and poor multiagency working ultimately led to a 'deterioration' of the young person and a need for more significant action.

While they were both evidently frustrated by the situation, it also seemed to have had an emotional effect on them as professionals with the Attendance and Inclusion Officer describing feeling 'deflated' and the Headteacher said they felt 'upset' and started to cry during the focus group, expressing feelings of 'guilt' about previously not recognising just how much these kinds of cases can affect staff. The Attendance and Inclusion Officer described themselves as 'quite thick-skinned' but as having 'not slept a wink' following the sectioning of the young person. They felt that it is challenging 'dealing daily with people's lives and impacts and harm'. Both also expressed sympathy for the difficulties the mother in this case was experiencing; it was clear that the care and compassion they felt for all involved was taking its toll, exacerbated by poor experiences of multiagency working.

Other cases involving HSB discussed by participants included a student with complex needs and, in all likelihood, a history of trauma and abuse 'making disclosures up.' Any referrals made to MASH by the school resulted in no feedback to the school, with similar occurring following a referral of a student after some 'child-on-child abuse between her and another child in the school.' This young person later 'ran away' and the school again received no feedback from a referral:

'...but it turned out she'd met someone who was classed as more vulnerable than her and she was engaging them in some form of HSB so I think there were lots of things there - lots of agencies involved at different points, but we never really got told as to what happened as a result of that.' (Headteacher).

The lack of insight into the situation because of poor communication meant they felt unable to respond effectively with the Headteacher saying: 'We would have dealt with that in a very different way if we'd known what had happened.... Because we got no feedback about it, we thought it wasn't anything... thought there was no further action...' The accounts shared indicate that multiagency working can be experienced as hostile and accusatory in complex cases and that there is scope to improve trust and responsiveness between partners responsible for safeguarding very vulnerable young people. The school wanted to feel 'listened to [and] taken seriously' (Headteacher) and believed that multiagency working should be about 'trusting us and listening to us and trying to work with us [because] ... we've got a very good idea about their [young people's and families'] need and support' (Attendance and Inclusion Officer). More practically, they wanted better communication and liaison.

Protective Behaviours training: The 'Protective Behaviours' training was delivered to the whole-staff team in this school and feedback was very positive. The resources and techniques provided through the training for use with students were valued by teachers, who intended to use them in lessons and mentor sessions. There were some reported increases in insights into the connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours when dealing with students and how to educate students about these connections. There was some emphasis on teaching protective behaviours to different cohorts, including vulnerable students, and in different settings (e.g., one-to-one or in groups). The training seems to have been valued for creating safe spaces for teachers and students and seems to have offered practical ways to deliver the teaching. The trainer/facilitator was well-regarded by teachers.

7.9 KPMG09

A co-educational alternative provision free school (11-17) and of small size. Based in an urban city and town, approximately 45% of students received free school meals (significantly higher than national statistics), and 14.1% came from a minority ethnic group (significantly lower than national statistics). The school community reported a high level of HSB concerns.

Engagement plan: The school engagement plan outlined a vulnerable cohort. Students had additional needs and extensive experience of domestic abuse in the home. These vulnerabilities were deemed to be creating problems with sexist attitudes and normalised unhealthy relationships that operated particularly to the detriment of girls. There were also concerns, as expressed in the all-boys school (KPMG02), regarding the risk of criminalisation and negative labelling of boys for their behaviours. As with KPMG08, students' desire for peer acceptance and inclusion, as well as emotional dysregulation, was deemed to be exacerbating the issues among students. 'Cultural factors' were considered responsible for creating sexist attitudes and 'social media use outside of school' was described as problematic. There were also concerns about students joining the school part-way through the academic year, which made change difficult to implement. The engagement plan emphasised taking a 'whole school approach' and working on keeping students safe through protective behaviours and engaging with parents to address their role. Consultation with girls was mentioned as a youth-led way to identify issues affecting girls.

Protective Behaviours training: The Protective Behaviours training was also delivered in this school. Feedback suggests that it helped teachers to reflect on how they deliver teaching and their use of language. Teachers valued the insights and techniques learnt and plan to use the resources with different groups and in classrooms. There was also some value for daily practice, and it was a refresher for some teachers. There was some indication from feedback that the approach may be beneficial for use with particular types of students, although one teacher said it would be helpful to have more techniques to use with students who may struggle to speak about things that are wrong and/or have emotional or other problems with regulation. In response to this, specific resources (board games to assist with emotional literacy/naming feelings) were purchased from a specialist educational supplier to assist students with additional needs and were well-received by the school.

Timetabling difficulties prevented the delivery of student focus groups and workshops for parents, but contact continues and these are planned for year 2.

7.10 KPMG10

A co-educational community school (11-16) and of small size. Based on a major urban conurbation, 28.3% of students received free school meals (approximate to national statistics), and 14.9% came from a minority ethnic group (lower than national statistics). The school community reported a high level of HSB concerns.

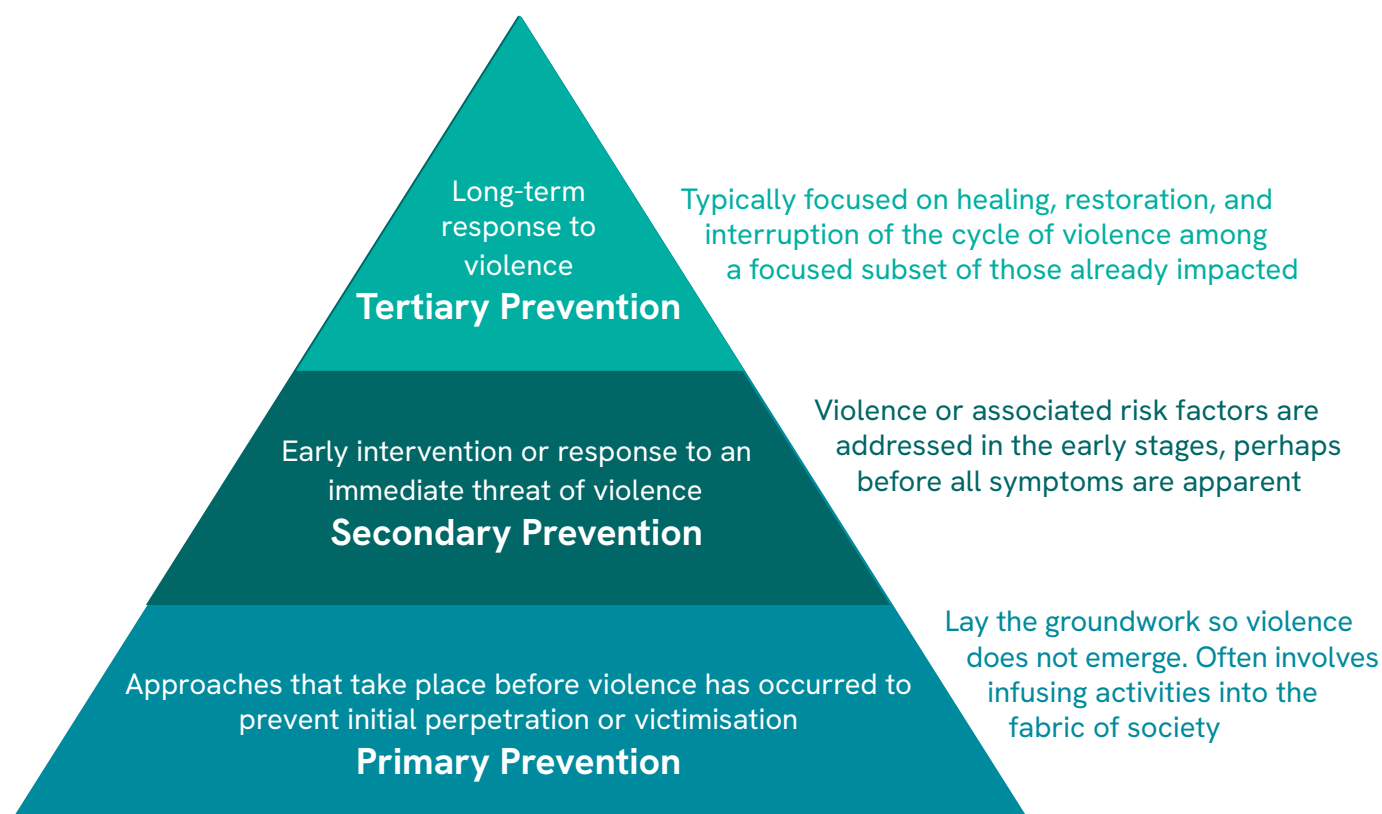
Engagement plan: The engagement plan suggests that the school framed HSB as a cultural issue or, at least, an issue requiring a 'whole school approach' that addresses contextual and cultural aspects (e.g., regarding staff buy-in, 'calling out' problematic behaviours, etc.). There seemed to be an emphasis on aspects of school climate, for instance regarding perceptions of safety and confidence and willingness to report.

Training on recognising and responding to HSB was delivered during a September INSET day and was well-received, though unfortunately none of the other planned interventions took place as the two main contacts (both designated safeguarding leads) experienced work-related stress and were off school for extended periods in the autumn term. Support has been offered outside of the project remit via ad-hoc consultancy and will be delivered when appropriate.

8. Promising practice

Based upon the engagement plans and impact evaluations of the interventions delivered, three resources were particularly well-received by staff and students: Protective Behaviours training for staff, bystander education for students, and RSHE curriculum reviews and staff training to support a more participatory approach to RSHE.

In reflecting upon these resources, and analysing them in the context of existing research, we have been interested to observe that there is a theme that links them: all three could be considered primary prevention approaches, using a public health model of prevention. A public health model of crime or violence prevention identifies primary, secondary and tertiary level interventions and is illustrated in the diagram below:



Protective Behaviours, bystander education and participatory RSHE are universal approaches, which can be delivered to all students, whether or not they have been affected by HSB. School staff have told us they value this for a number of reasons, including:

- delivering input to all students using a whole-school approach can significantly affect both school climate and culture, changing the language used around the school to improve the culture and perception of safety
- all students can benefit from approaches designed to enhance their empathy, perspective-taking and skill development.
- a universal resource avoids singling out any individual students or groups and reduces the risk of stigmatising or labelling students.

When discussing the public health model of prevention, there can be some confusion around whether 'primary prevention interventions' relate to interventions delivered in primary schools. This is not the case, the level of intervention (primary, secondary or tertiary) does not correspond to the education stage it is delivered (primary, secondary, further or higher). Indeed, it is of benefit that all levels of intervention are delivered at all stages of education, as required.

Though the ten schools we worked with were all at the secondary stage, we do work with numerous primary schools outside of the project remit. There is interest in whether these approaches can be adapted for primary schools. Protective Behaviours can be used with people of any and all ages as it is a process rather than a manual or programme. Bystander education has traditionally been delivered to older students but there is perhaps scope for considering how the key elements outlined below could be adapted for primary school children. Relationships Education (rather than Relationships and Sex Education) is taught in primary schools, but similar facilitation skills are needed by all teachers to build safe, inclusive environments for age-appropriate conversations. It is therefore hoped that some of this learning is also useful and valuable for primary schools.

Each approach is discussed in more detail below.

8.1 Protective Behaviours training

The catalyst for this training offer came from several engagement plans and student focus groups, where staff identified a desire to harness student motivation to tackle HSB, and students expressed a desire to be part of the solution. This training programme aims to prevent abuse through enabling professionals to develop young people's awareness of the relationships between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and, in turn, their ability to identify and take action in response to feeling unsafe with recognition of the difficulties they may experience in doing so in their day-to-day lives and interactions with others. It predates but resonates with some theories underpinning Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) although is not a form of CBT itself. It is a framework to link ideas together and while conceived of as a way of preventing abuse, can also apply to bullying, racism, homophobia, etc.

While it may seem that young people are being held unduly responsible for keeping themselves safe (rather than focusing on perpetrators of abuse), the programme holds potential regarding empowering young people and helping them to develop personal insight and emotional literacy, as well as empathy and perspective taking regarding the needs and feelings of others. The latter is perhaps particularly pertinent in the context of peer-on-peer HSB, whereby young people may be perpetrators, victims, and/or witnesses/bystanders of abuse and need insight into both how they and others may be feeling and how best to respond to risky and unsafe behaviours. It is, therefore, potentially a way to support youth-led action and behavioural change, to tackle HSB within their peer contexts. It is also rights-based and linked to matters of privacy and bodily integrity and autonomy.

Through connecting thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, the training may help young people to gain awareness of themselves as developing within a socio-sexual ecosystem whereby they experience different sources of influence and pressure that may shape, even constrain, their choices and actions. It conceptualises a right to feel safe, while distinguishing feeling from being safe. Regarding this distinction, it addresses the 'unwritten rules' that may prevent a young person from recognising that they are unsafe or, even if they do feel unsafe, that may prevent them from taking action. These 'unwritten rules' pertain to the norms and learning within the ecosystem that affect an individual's ability to keep themselves safe and to uphold the safety of others. The notion of unwritten rules may help in exploring perceptions of expectation and obligation and can re-embody young people with their own feelings of being unsafe through showing how unwritten rules prevent them from connecting with their own feelings and making their own choices. Theorising around 'sexual scripts' is relevant here and may help in explicating the gender norms and other cultural dimensions of unwritten rules.

For example, regarding 'consent', there are written rules ('the law') but also unwritten rules about what constitutes consent. Exploring the distinctions may create scope for engaging with how people feel and what they are and are not comfortable with and how that can change. It may, therefore, help address the 'grey areas' of consent and challenge perceptions of expectation and obligation. The approach critically deconstructs notions of 'should', 'ought', or 'must.' Through gaining self-awareness on these points, young people can develop reciprocal respect for others' rights and feelings. The approach can also help for enabling bystander intervention through identifying why young people may not always feel comfortable or able to intervene because of unwritten rules that may crowd out any internal early warning signs that a

behaviour or situation feels wrong or unsafe. For example, an unwritten rule may be that a 'bad friend is better than no friends', which may make a young person feel reluctant to report or intervene (see Harder, 2020; 'emotional bystander.')

It also addresses feeling safe in ways that do not preclude purposeful risk-taking and adventure and addresses emotional literacy regarding the boundaries between and continuum of safety and unsafety. It considers choice, control, and time limits as integral to managing these boundaries. Pertinent to defining and responding to HSB, it shows that if a young person describes feelings of being unsafe these should not be denied or trivialized and, therefore, if a person feels that a behaviour is harmful then it should be addressed on that basis.

8.2 Bystander Intervention

Again, the catalyst for this programme arose within engagement plans and focus groups, particularly at KPMG01 where students were motivated to address HSB but in ways that were deemed unsafe by staff. The concept of Bystander Intervention (BI) refers to 'bystanders' (a person or people present or witness to, but not directly involved in a situation) taking action, directly or indirectly, to respond to a risky or harmful situation in ways that reduce the likelihood or actuality of harm. The theoretical underpinning to BI relates to the power that those present have to influence the outcomes of a situation through challenging and/or supporting the individuals within the situation and, more broadly, shaping the social norms that affect the way that individuals behave in a given situation (Rogers et al., 2019). BI can both impact the immediate situation and affect the likelihood of future situations arising; the latter relating to how changing normative contexts through BI can affect individuals' behaviour through changing what is deemed acceptable and appropriate in a given situation (McMahon et al., 2021). There can also be justice-related outcomes regarding the provision of support for actual or potential victims of harm (Banyard et al., 2004). The belief and expectation among victims and others witnessing abuse that they will be supported by peers can, in turn, improve reporting rates of incidents of harm (Amar et al., 2015; Ortiz and Shafer, 2018).

Most of the evidence regarding the effectiveness of 'Bystander Intervention Training' (BIT) comes from the US (Labhardt et al., 2017). The evidence base is conflicted, with some indication that BIT may increase awareness and willingness to intervene but longer-term effects on behaviour are not guaranteed. Moreover, most evidence is based on college samples (young adults) and so may not generalize to other populations, including adolescents although there have been some studies conducted with younger cohorts.

While attitude change may take place following BIT (e.g., Winegust, 2015), this does not always translate into behaviour change (in terms of increased rates of BI, notwithstanding any professed intention to intervene following BIT), particularly over the longer-term (Coker et al., 2015; Gidycz, Orchowski and Berkowitz, 2011; Wamboldt et al., 2019).

Overall, studies suggest that BIT must involve an integrated approach that addresses awareness and recognition, skills, empathy, and norms (Amar et al., 2015; Banyard et al., 2004; McMahon et al., 2021; Reid and Dune, 2017; Rogers et al., 2019; Salazar, Vivolo-Kantor and Schipani-McLaughlin, 2019; Senn and Forrest, 2016; Steward, 2017; Yule and Grych, 2020). Such an approach cannot just instruct BI but must also address the normalisation of harmful behaviour and raise awareness about its causes and effects (Albury et al., 2017; Oak, Julich & Morton, 2020).

There is a socio-emotional dimension to BI. There is evidence that young people may recognise risky or harmful behaviours and situations but may feel unable to intervene because of social norms that deter intervention and, relatedly, a desire to maintain one's position in the peer group and to avoid ostracizing peers through 'taking things too seriously' or, even, 'cock blocking' one's peers (Setty, 2022; Setty & Dobson, 2023). Harding (2020) explores this issue with regard to BI in response to abusive image sharing among young people. She found that young people may 'go along' with abusive sharing and may not challenge it in order to achieve inclusion and 'cultural capital' among peers, notwithstanding any discomfort they feel about what they have witnessed. In other words, individuals may not always intervene, even if they know that what has happened or is happening is wrong. It will not be enough just to tell young people to

intervene, therefore, the social and emotional barriers to doing so must be addressed and, in turn, young people need realistic options that they feel able and willing to use in their peer contexts. Any BI initiatives must, furthermore, also be inclusive and constructive given that approaches to challenging risky or harmful behaviour may, otherwise, just alienate individuals, cause defensiveness, and, ultimately, not address the root causes of the problem. 'Calling people in' may be a better way of framing BI than 'calling people out.' For example, emphasis is often placed on the role of boys and young men in challenging sexist attitudes and harmful behaviours among other boys and young men. There can be difficulties entailed if boys and young men feel unduly blamed or unfairly maligned, which may lead to defensiveness (Burrell, 2020; Flood and Burrell, 2022). The key here is taking an approach that addresses wider contexts and empowers boys and young men to make sense of social and cultural norms and the ways that they and others are affected by and can address the problems around them. It is vital to recognise that while boys and young men may be deemed to benefit from gender inequitable arrangements regarding rights to and reward available through sexual behaviour (including harmful behaviours), individual boys and young men may have a more complex socio-sexual subjectivity and space must be made for the development of emotional literacy and self-awareness, not just telling boys and young men that they must intervene because they, as a class, are somehow deficient or inherently to blame.

While there may remain social and emotional barriers to BI following BIT, there is evidence that even if individuals do not engage in more BI, they may reflect on their own behaviour and so BIT may, indirectly, reduce the prevalence of harmful behaviour (Hirsch and Khan, 2021).

Some programmes have specifically focused on raising young women's awareness of and willingness to challenge harmful behaviours (e.g., Foubert et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2017). However, it is important not to over-focus on young women's so-called 'risk behaviours' because of the victim blaming that this could be deemed to represent (Foubert et al., 2010). It may also over-individualise the risk and it is important to address prosocial modelling, policies, the physical environment, and expectations of institutional support and an effective response (Jouriles et al., 2020; McMahon & Banyard, 2012).

8.3 Participatory Relationships and Sex Education

Most schools and students mentioned RSHE in their engagement plans or focus groups. There is an extensive scholarship and empirical evidence attesting to young people's desire for active and participatory approaches to RSHE that position them as legitimate sexual subjects and citizens and whereby their experiences and existing knowledge is taken seriously (e.g., Cameron-Lewis & Allen, 2013; Naezer, 2018; O'Higgins & Gabhainn, 2010; Jarpe-Ratner & Marshall, 2012). Such approaches are, furthermore, deemed to be more effective and impactful than are more adult-expert/student-passive approaches (Pound et al., 2016; 2017). However, the challenge in active and participatory RSHE formats is in ensuring that students feel safe and that educators feel willing and capable of both eliciting student contributions and managing classroom discussions.

Active and participatory RSHE may conflict with wider pedagogical principles within school environments when pedagogy typically takes the form of a teacher imparting correct knowledge to students and, in turn, requires a change in age-based hierarchies of knowledge. It is not that students are to dictate to teachers, more that students have an opportunity to raise and define topics of relevance, incorporate their existing knowledge and experiences, and develop and implement solutions to the issues they face (Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2013). It also involves active discussion and deliberation among students rather than a teacher telling them the information or predetermining what is the right and wrong way to think, feel, and behave. An active and participatory approach is perhaps particularly vital for new and emerging topics of concern about which teachers may lack the necessary expertise, insight and, in turn, credibility among students, for example, online sexual cultures and behaviours (Lee et al., 2018).

Young people express a strong desire for RSHE to incorporate their cultural references and wider experiential learning and subjective experience (Buckingham, 1998; Naezer et al., 2018). It has become evident that young people very much value learning from experience and do not want to be told the outcome but instead to be supported through an experiential journey (Setty & Dobson, 2023). In other

words, there is little value to young people in being told what they can and cannot expect at a certain point and for their current realities to be discounted. Instead, they want to make sense of what they experience personally and around them and to be enabled and empowered to reflect and grow.

It is important that RSHE educators are skilled, knowledgeable, and effective as facilitators (Pound et al., 2017). RSHE should not be unstructured, and students may need to also receive education in critical thinking, perspective-taking, and communication skills, in order to ensure that debate and discussion within the classroom takes place sensitively, inclusively, and constructively. Such education should be a pre-requisite to studying the specific topics, particularly more sensitive and contested topics, and should be incorporated throughout the RSHE curriculum. Young people emphasise that they do not want teachers to, implicitly or explicitly, impose their beliefs and values; instead, they want to understand the range of perspectives and experiences that may exist and to make sense of themselves within wider contexts (Setty et al., 2022). This teaching style has the potential to both benefit the individual's socio-sexual development and also the relationships between peers because of the scope for increased empathy and perspective-taking.

A very important consideration of active and participatory RSHE relates to the above emphasis on bystander intervention. Essentially, BI works in the absence of direct adult involvement or action; it is about young people harnessing their role in addressing risky and harmful behaviour and the underlying normative contextual causes. In order for BIT to be successful, it must address the barriers and facilitators to intervening and raise awareness of the behaviours and the normative contexts at play. Without hearing from young people about what the issues are and what they feel would be a realistic way of intervening safely, inclusively, and constructively, it will be difficult for BIT to be effective. The data raises questions that require further reflection. Given the distinct but intertwining emphases on school climate and school culture, there is a question regarding what constitutes an intervention and the level at which it should take place. Relatedly, given the continuum of HSB and the various forms it can take, coupled with the complexities of the underlying causes, it is clear that best practice would involve students playing an active role in identifying and solving problems. Yet, it is unclear whether and how students can be constructively involved in ways that schools are content with and, furthermore, how to engage with students in an inclusive way that does not further entrench division or resentment. There is also the somewhat controversial problem regarding the role of adults in enabling or exacerbating the contexts of HSB, specifically regarding the perpetuation of harmful attitudes and over-focus on particular types of young people and particular issues in ways that may not align with the concerns or priorities of young people.

There are practical and attitude-related factors to address regarding barriers to addressing HSB, both among students and staff. Improving reporting rates and responses to incidents seems to be hampered by factors relating to school and student cultures. Moreover, and related to the above point about what constitutes an intervention, there is a question regarding the extent to which HSB will be solved through reporting to adults and adult intervention. It should, perhaps, instead be acknowledged that young people need to be given tools to deal with problems themselves. These tools need to be realistic and applicable for use in the reality of young people's day-to-day peer contexts; namely, young people need to feel safe and willing to take action (e.g., regarding BI).

There is also an indication that a purely incident-driven approach will not fully address underlying causes and may represent a missed opportunity to meaningfully engage with the contexts in which young people are developing as socio-sexual subjects in ways that transcend HSB as a specific problem. Again reflecting the issue of identifying what constitutes an intervention, there is perhaps a need to develop interventions that engage with social norms and the socio-affective dimensions of sex and relationships for young people. As noted in some engagement plans, relevant parts of the 'ecosystem' include media, families, wider communities, etc. and need to be integrated within an intervention. Recognising these complexities and the fluidity of development and experience may help in understanding why providing information, and associated knowledge and awareness-raising, does not always correspond with hoped-for behaviour and attitude change. Examples pertain to why understanding the law on consent does not mean that sexual experiences are always consensual and why being able to list the traits of un/healthy relationships does

not prevent young people from experiencing unhealthy relationships. A more integrated approach would provide young people with the skills, critical awareness, and emotional literacy they need to connect knowledge to attitudes and behaviour.

More broadly, there is a question regarding how all this can be achieved within institutional constraints and imperatives affecting schools. A specific issue includes the implications of safeguarding and referral policies for responding to HSB, in light of young people's concerns about confidentiality and escalation. There may be counterproductive effects of policy and protocol regarding inhibiting reporting rates and missing opportunities to listen and gather insights about issues affecting students on an informal level. A 'whole school approach' requires consistency across policy and practice but also, in these regards, a recognition of the intersections between policies and practices to avoid unintended consequences.

Another school-level challenge potentially relates to the design and delivery of RSHE policy and curriculum. RSHE holds the scope to play a key role in prevention with then more targeted responses to incidents. There is, however, perhaps a need for specialist RSHE teachers or more consistent use of expert specialists. Essentially, the question relates to whether RSHE needs to be professionalised and systemised while recognising the importance of variability between schools and, in turn, discretion for school leaders and teachers to design and deliver curriculum and pedagogy that is relevant and impactful in their contexts. While various models of RSHE delivery may be effective, it could be argued that even if only some teachers are involved, the wider staffing body needs to 'buy-in' to addressing the problem because of the significance of language, attitudes, and responses among all staff.

8.4 Reflections on methodology and data

The survey data cannot tell us about actual practice, knowledge, or effectiveness, but does say something about perceptions among students and staff. Teachers may lack knowledge or competence, but not realise ('unconscious incompetence') or may be quite effective but not feel confident ('unconscious competence'). There may also be a normalisation of abuse among staff and students that affect reported perceptions. Secondly, while the student focus groups have generated insightful data, the orientation to safety and harmful behaviours may preclude discussion about the more complex intersections between pleasure, reward, risk, and harm which can characterise sex and relationships for young people within their peer contexts. Finally, given the positive feedback about the 'Protective Behaviours' training, there is scope potentially to position the programme as a way of helping young people develop and practice self-awareness, empathy, and critical awareness of the intra- and inter-personal dimensions of sex and relationships for young people. It may help bridge gaps between wider cultural dimensions of HSB (the 'unwritten rules' that shape feelings and experiences of un/safety) and the individual-level needs, meanings, and experiences regarding recognising and acting on abuse.




8.5 Other promising practice

In addition to these three whole-school, primary prevention approaches, there was other valuable learning from each school engagement. These are discussed in more depth in the following section, but in summary, we also designed, tested and evaluated the following interventions:

- two-hour staff twilight training sessions on subjects such as managing incidents of HSB in school, supporting parents to support online and offline safety, promoting positive masculinity and understanding child sexual exploitation
- similar one- and two-hour workshops for parents, with titles such as 'Keeping your child safe on and offline', and 'Understanding HSB and exploitation'
- reflective workbooks for staff and students to complete on a one-to-one basis after an HSB incident
- school safety plan templates

9. Process evaluation

The end of the first project year provided a milestone opportunity to reflect upon the outcomes achieved towards the initial aims. The diagram below summarises the project lead's assessment of the level of success achieved towards each strategic aim, rated high, medium or low. Sections 9.1 – 9.3 discuss why each rating was given.

Strategic Aim	Key Activities	Success
Respond 	R1 Survey data (baseline and end-line surveys)	Low
	R2 Understanding school context	Medium
	R3 Delivering interventions	High
Learn 	L1 Managing HSB incidents	High
	L2 Using early project learning	High
	L3 School engagement case study reports	High
	L4 Interim reports	High
	L5 Contributing to RSHE curriculum updates and guidance	Medium
Prevent 	P1 Final report influences government strategy	N/A
	P2 Contributions to government strategy	N/A
	P3 Sharing preventative measure for schools	High
	P4 Resources developed for schools	Medium

9.1 STRATEGIC AIM: RESPOND

<p>KEY ACTIVITY: Survey data (baseline and end-line surveys)</p>	<p>R1: Baseline measures of the school's ability to respond to and prevent HSB before engagement with the project, to compare against their ability to respond and prevent after their engagement with the project:</p> <p>We were only able to collect baseline survey data from two of the ten schools, owing to the reasons previously discussed regarding why some of the planned interventions could not be delivered: timetabling clashes, school staff absence or the project contact leaving the school, or lack of time to deliver before the project year-end. As a result, we have not been able to measure changes in schools' ability to respond to and prevent HSB after their engagement with the project. However, as the project progressed, it became apparent that the ten-question surveys for students and staff were not adding as much to our understanding of the school context as anticipated. School staff were sometimes reluctant to administer them for practical or logistical reasons, or because they felt that their students had been asked to complete multiple surveys in recent months. Additionally, over a year in the life of a school community, it would have been very difficult to evidence that there were any causal relationships between interventions delivered and survey data changes. We will therefore review whether or not we continue to offer the surveys in years 2 and 3, and consider alternative measures. We have reflected that we should not use this quantitative data as a means in itself, but rather as a way to stimulate further investigation of perceptions and beliefs.</p>
SUCCESS Low	
<p>KEY ACTIVITY: Understanding school context</p>	<p>R2: Information and data-gathering across all participant groups to understand the context and circumstances of each school's experiences of HSB which informed the design of interventions tailored to each school. This included: focus groups, interviews with individuals, online and offline surveys, and creative workshops/assemblies.</p> <p>The initial interviews in each school were rich in contextual insights, but it was sometimes difficult to capture this data for analysis. Building trust and rapport with school staff was vital, so audio-recording the first meetings could have been counter-productive in some settings when discussing such a sensitive subject. The development of the engagement plans, therefore, often relied heavily upon LFF practitioner notes and interpretation of the conversations, which will have introduced some bias into the way the issues were understood and framed. A more consistent richness and depth to engagement plans would have improved outcomes. It was concluded that it was much easier to get a handle on the school situation with the more elaborate engagement plans and notes. However, the variety of interventions delivered leads us to conclude that we were moderately successful with this aim. In addition, we need to do more to facilitate student perspectives on engagement plans and priority issues, underlying causes and so on, early on in the engagement process.</p>
SUCCESS Medium	
<p>KEY ACTIVITY: Delivering interventions</p>	<p>R3: Development of interventions for responding to and preventing HSB.</p> <p>A substantive range of new interventions and resources has been developed in response to the issues raised in each of the ten schools. These include numerous training packages for staff: six-hour whole-school Protective Behaviours training, two-hour twilight training sessions on subjects such as managing incidents of HSB in school, supporting parents to support online and offline safety, promoting positive masculinity and understanding child sexual exploitation. Similar one- and two-hour workshops have been developed for parents, with titles such as 'Keeping your child safe on and offline', and 'Understanding HSB and exploitation'. Resources for students have included a specially-adapted bystander education programme, Protective Behaviours workbooks, reflective workbooks to complete after an HSB incident, and school safety plan templates (discussed further below). These resources will continue to be disseminated, delivered, refined and added to throughout years 2 and 3.</p>
SUCCESS High	

9.2 STRATEGIC AIM: LEARN

<p>KEY ACTIVITY: Managing HSB incidents</p>	<p>L1: Supporting schools to manage incidents of HSB In the case of specific incidents of HSB in schools which required individual assessments and interventions, notes were taken and analysed to identify emerging themes around risk factors that increase the likelihood of displaying or being exposed to HSB, and the support needs of these students. Signposting to relevant services (internally through LFF or to external agencies) was recorded and analysed to identify where services can help and where there are gaps in provision. In supporting schools to manage incidents of HSB, we looked for best practice examples of safety plan templates. We identified that the NSPCC has published a comprehensive and holistic safety plan, but also found elements of good practice in other templates, such as various local authority documents. We approached NSPCC colleagues to request permission to adapt their template with additional content, and they generously gave us permission to edit their resource. They appreciated the amended version and now signpost service users to it. Alongside this new resource, we also signpost schools to the extensive guidance for schools by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse. This collaboration between organisations has received excellent feedback from schools, with numerous examples of the guidance and safety plan being used to secure positive outcomes for students, families and staff.</p>
SUCCESS High	
<p>KEY ACTIVITY: Using early project learning</p>	<p>L2: Using early project learning from the first schools to support project progression The incremental learning gained from each school engagement has been effectively shared with schools as opportunities arise, such as disseminating effective resources between schools. Additionally, the process of working with each school has been enhanced by the previous engagement of earlier schools, such as a deeper understanding of the issues arising and reinforcement of emerging themes. This is even more apparent during the recruitment and initial engagement with the next ten year 2 schools – the process has been refined, the formulation of the issues is deeper and there is an increased range of interventions/resources to offer year 2 schools.</p>
SUCCESS High	
<p>KEY ACTIVITY: School engagement case study reports</p>	<p>L3: Case studies written up after each engagement Notes of every contact with each school and insights from data analysis formed the basis of the case studies (section 8) which were written up after each engagement. These case studies summarise the learning from each individual school regarding key issues, concerns, gaps in resources/provision and generated themes. Though the case studies vary in length and depth, they accurately summarise the engagement and findings from each school. The richness of the qualitative data, especially from student and staff focus groups, is a strength of this first year's findings.</p>
SUCCESS High	
<p>KEY ACTIVITY: Interim reports</p>	<p>L4: Interim reports This report for education and government stakeholders (Ofsted, DfE, Home Office, Education Scotland, and NAHT) summarises the learning from the case studies at the end of each year. A second interim report will be provided at the end of year two, and a final report at the end of the project. Despite the scant quantitative data at this early stage, caused by the logistical difficulties in administering the surveys, it is our hope that the findings drawn from the rich qualitative data (in terms of generated themes and promising practice) are of sufficient interest to outweigh this difficulty.</p>
SUCCESS High	
<p>KEY ACTIVITY: Contributing to RSHE curriculum updates and guidance</p>	<p>L5: Evidence and data contributing to the ongoing development and updates needed for the RSHE curriculum. Evidence generated through analysis of case studies, especially on the themes of sexual harassment, sexual violence, cyber resilience, pornography and consent has been shared with key stakeholders. A significant success from this first year has been in the quality and strength of stakeholder relationships. Having presented to the Home Office's quarterly round-table 'HSB Network Meeting' we then established regular meetings with key contacts from the Home Office and DfE's RSHE lead. These strategic relationships ensure a multi-directional flow of learning, updates and influence.</p>
SUCCESS Medium	

9.3 STRATEGIC AIM: PREVENT

KEY ACTIVITY: Final report influences government strategy	<p>P1: The final report will include recommendations for government to strategically influence governmental responses to HSB in schools. We cannot currently report against this outcome as it will be achieved after all the learning from years 1, 2 and 3 is collated in March 2025.</p>
SUCCESS N/A	
KEY ACTIVITY: Contributions to government strategy	<p>P2: Adaptation, strengthening and creation of guidance needed to address the prevalence of sexual harm in schools (e.g., Keeping Children Safe In Education). As above.</p>
SUCCESS N/A	
KEY ACTIVITY: Sharing preventative measures for schools	<p>P3: Sharing preventative measures schools can implement to make their communities safer. It is notable that all three of our highlighted 'promising practice' approaches are primary prevention strategies. We did not set out with the expectation that this is what would be valued, yet this is what schools have told us is most important to them. Interestingly, one of the new year 2 schools is looking to use the Protective Behaviours process to address some wider community cohesion issues, stemming from HSB concerns. We are looking forward to seeing how this work progresses and will report back in our year 2 review report.</p>
SUCCESS High	
KEY ACTIVITY: Resources developed for schools	<p>P4: Resources developed for schools to use and shared widely with support from partners (DfE, Ofsted, Home Office). We are already seeing some encouraging dissemination of new resources, such as the new school safety plan template via stakeholders including the NSPCC and CSA Centre. We will continue to share our findings with all project partners on an ongoing basis in stakeholder meetings, and also through the more formal mechanism of these end-of-year reports.</p>
SUCCESS Medium	

9.4 Additional insights from ad-hoc support offered to schools outside of the project scope.

In recognition of the need for specialist support from many more than ten schools per year, we explored ways to work with schools that fell outside the project's remit: for example; primary schools, schools outside of the Midlands area, and schools that would have been eligible for the project but contacted us after the first ten project schools were recruited.

Between 10 January and 31 December 2022, we supported an additional 47 schools. The type of support provided varied, but can be summarised as:

- implementing new call-back slots for education professionals who had called our Stop It Now! helpline

In many cases, helpline advisors could resolve queries during the initial call, but where callers and/or advisors felt additional support would be beneficial, we offered one-hour call-backs with specialist schools' practitioners. We monitored the subjects of these calls and recognised that the majority were in relation to concerns about an individual student. In response, we developed the new school safety plan template discussed above in section 9.3, L1. We worked closely with callers to try to 'fill the gaps' that they were identifying in existing templates, and to co-produce a plan that helped them to consider

the holistic needs and strengths of their student, as well as the concrete, achievable steps that could be implemented to improve everyone's safety and wellbeing. Given that the template was developed in such close consultation with education professionals, we are confident that this is a valuable new resource and have received entirely positive feedback about its application and effectiveness in schools, for example:

Feedback from a teacher who utilised a call-back slot after a call to the Stop It Now! Helpline:

"[The LFF practitioner] was incredibly helpful and knowledgeable and worked fantastically well to bridge the gap between us as a school and Mum. The resources she provided were very useful too and allowed us to put in a much more holistic and in-depth safety plan than the one we had initially created through [local authority] guidance."

- **In-person school visits to complete safety plans with parents/carers and students**

In publishing our new schools' webpage, safety plan templates and links to expert guidance, we aimed to improve the confidence of education staff to complete safety planning independently, or with support from an LFF practitioner during a helpline call. However, there have been some situations in which it has been useful to offer in-person support, for example, when the student is very young, has significant special educational needs, or where the parent/carers is finding the situation overwhelming.

A headteacher who had requested additional support after a call back for a Year 5 student wrote, following two in-person visits from an LFF practitioner:

"The LFF worker was extremely supportive with a challenging situation where I had exhausted all my other strategies and interventions. The personalised support we have received both online in an initial meeting and then face-to-face with parents has enabled us to work towards securing a better outcome for both the children and the family."

- **Offering free consultancy for up to three hours for schools with wider school culture concerns:**

Where a helpline call identified the presenting issue for the caller as something affecting several students, staff or the overall school culture, we were able to offer tailored interventions to address this, such as:

- ▶ whole-school staff training: 90 minutes to two-hour workshops on issues such as managing the emotional impact upon staff of safeguarding and HSB, managing incidents of HSB, and supporting parents to support their children's safety
- ▶ workshops with parents/carers: 90 minutes to two-hour workshops on keeping their children safe on and offline, understanding grooming and exploitation, and supporting the development of healthy relationships
- ▶ curriculum enhancement resources for students: 30- minute lessons or assemblies on grooming and exploitation, protective behaviours and understanding HSB

One particularly interesting intervention was the development of a 6 x 30-minute session Protective Behaviours programme for London's largest sixth form college (570 students). The Head of Sixth Form emailed LFF to ask what could be offered to her students in response to the publication of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) report in October 2022. She was shocked by how many of her students may have been affected by childhood sexual abuse, based upon the statistics published in the report that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys will experience CSA before the age of 16. She wanted to equip them with knowledge and skills to avoid victimisation for themselves and others, so we co-designed the six-session programme to address the prevalence of CSA, common myths, and indicators of grooming/exploitation, plus a brief introduction to the Protective Behaviours process, focusing on students' rights to feel safe and practical strategies to help them know what to do when they feel unsafe.

She wrote:

“The devastating scale and long-term impact of child abuse, on individuals and society, was made even more apparent from last October’s IICSA Report. As a result, I emailed The Lucy Faithfull Foundation as I very much wanted to equip my Sixth Form students, as young adults, with the knowledge going forward to protect their children, and to understand the importance of seeking support if they, or their family or friends, had been victims themselves.

As a result of my request, I was delighted to be contacted by [LFF practitioner], who planned and delivered a series of six excellent RSHE lessons to my large Sixth Form of five hundred students. The lessons provided them with awareness of the findings of the IICSA Report, the signs of grooming and the knowledge of the protective behaviours that they can take to protect themselves and others if ever they feel unsafe. Also, the importance of seeking support and therapy if they have experienced trauma, and how and where to access this.

The lessons brought the subject into the light and made the students less afraid to talk about CSA, due to the stigma and shame that is associated with it. The process of collaborating and working with [LFF practitioner] was superb, as her experience, sensitivity and understanding was evident throughout.”

In summary, the learning gained from providing ad-hoc support to schools outside of the project scope has been extremely valuable. Working with a larger sample size of schools has provided an additional depth and breadth of insights into the issues schools are facing, and the resources they need to tackle these issues. Co-producing new resources has enabled a two-way flow of learning: experience and need from schools informing resource design, and LFF’s specialist support provided in order to test, refine and implement the resources.

Working with schools on a one-off basis might also elicit more impartial feedback, which is not influenced by the ongoing working relationship that is required in the schools recruited to the action research project.

10. Questions to explore in years 2 and 3

How can interventions address both school climate and culture issues to respond to or prevent HSB?

The data raises questions that require further reflection. Given the distinct but intertwining emphases on school climate and school culture, there is a question regarding what constitutes an intervention and the level at which it should take place.

How can students be engaged in identifying and solving these issues?

Relatedly, given the continuum of HSB and the various forms it can take, coupled with the complexities of the underlying causes, it is clear that best practice would involve students playing an active role in identifying and solving problems. Yet, it is unclear whether and how students can be constructively involved in ways that schools are content with and, how to engage with students in an inclusive way that does not further entrench division or resentment.

What is the role of an adult and student in this context?

There is also the somewhat controversial problem regarding the role of adults in enabling or exacerbating the contexts of HSB, specifically regarding the perpetuation of harmful attitudes and over-focus on particular types of young people and particular issues in ways that may not align with the concerns or priorities of young people.

How can HSB reporting rates be addressed and improved?

There are practical and attitude-related factors to address regarding barriers to addressing HSB, both among students and staff. Improving reporting rates and responses to incidents seems to be hampered by factors relating to school and student cultures. Moreover, and related to the above point about what constitutes an intervention, there is a question regarding the extent to which HSB will be solved through reporting to adults and adult intervention. It should, perhaps, instead be acknowledged that young people need to be given tools to deal with problems themselves. These tools need to be realistic and applicable for use in the reality of young people's day-to-day peer contexts; namely, young people need to feel safe and willing to take action (e.g., regarding bystander intervention).

How can interventions address the influence of wider social ecosystems?

There is also an indication that a purely incident-driven approach will not fully address underlying causes and may represent a missed opportunity to meaningfully engage with the contexts in which young people are developing as socio-sexual subjects in ways that transcend HSB as a specific problem. Again, reflecting the issue of identifying what constitutes an intervention, there is perhaps a need to develop interventions that engage with social norms and the socio-affective dimensions of sex and relationships for young people. As noted in some engagement plans, relevant parts of the 'ecosystem' include media, families, wider communities, etc. and need to be integrated within an intervention.

What could an integrated approach to HSB interventions look like?

Recognising these complexities and the fluidity of development and experience may help in understanding why providing information, and associated knowledge and awareness-raising, does not always correspond with hoped-for behaviour and attitude change. Examples pertain to why understanding the law on consent does not mean that sexual experiences are always consensual and why being able to list the traits of un/healthy relationships does not prevent young people from experiencing unhealthy relationships. A more integrated approach would provide young people with the skills, critical awareness, and emotional literacy they need to connect knowledge to attitudes and behaviour.

What does an effective 'whole-school approach' require?

More broadly, there is a question regarding how all this can be achieved within institutional constraints and imperatives affecting schools. A specific issue includes the implications of safeguarding and referral policies for responding to HSB, in light of young people's concerns about confidentiality and escalation. There may be counterproductive effects of policy and protocol regarding inhibiting reporting rates and

missing opportunities to listen and gather insights about issues affecting students on an informal level. A 'whole school approach' requires consistency across policy and practice but also, in these regards, a recognition of the intersections between policies and practices to avoid unintended consequences.

How can teachers be better supported to deliver effective Relationships and Sex Education?

Another school-level challenge potentially relates to the design and delivery of RSHE policy and curriculum. RSHE holds the scope to play a key role in prevention with then more targeted responses to incidents. There is, however, perhaps a need for specialist RSHE teachers or more consistent use of expert specialists. Essentially, the question relates to whether RSHE needs to be professionalised and systematised while recognising the importance of variability between schools and, in turn, discretion for school leaders and teachers to design and deliver curriculum and pedagogy that is relevant and impactful in their contexts. While various models of RSHE delivery may be effective, it could be argued that even if only some teachers are involved, the wider staffing body needs to 'buy-in' to addressing the problem because of the significance of language, attitudes, and responses among all staff.

How can the data collection methods be improved in years 2 and 3?

Regarding this project, there are reflections on the methodology and data. The survey data, for example, cannot tell us about actual practice, knowledge, or effectiveness, but does say something about perceptions among students and staff. Teachers may lack knowledge or competence, but not realise ('unconscious incompetence') or may be quite effective but not feel confident ('unconscious competence'). There may also be a normalisation of abuse among staff and students that affect reported perceptions. Secondly, while the student focus groups have generated insightful data, the orientation to safety and harmful behaviours may preclude discussion about the more complex intersections between pleasure, reward, risk, and harm which can characterise sex and relationships for young people within their peer contexts.

How can teachers be supported to harness the Protective Behaviours process as a primary prevention approach?

Finally, given the positive feedback about the 'Protective Behaviour' training, there is scope potentially to position the programme as a way of helping young people develop and practice self-awareness, empathy, and critical awareness of the intra- and inter-personal dimensions of sex and relationships for young people. There are wide-ranging applications of the practical skills which are developed by Protective Behaviours work. These skills extend beyond the issue of HSB in schools and help to equip students for their whole life-course.

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