



House of Commons
Women and Equalities
Committee

**Sexual harassment
and sexual violence in
schools**

Third Report of Session 2016–17

*Report, together with formal minutes
relating to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed
7 September 2016*

The Women and Equalities Committee

The Women and Equalities Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

Current membership

[Mrs Maria Miller MP](#) (*Conservative, Basingstoke*) (Chair)

[Ruth Cadbury MP](#) (*Labour, Brentford and Isleworth*)

[Maria Caulfield MP](#) (*Conservative, Lewes*)

[Jo Churchill MP](#) (*Conservative, Bury St Edmonds*)

[Angela Crawley MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Lanark and Hamilton East*)

[Mims Davies MP](#) (*Conservative, Eastleigh*)

[Mrs Flick Drummond MP](#) (*Conservative, Portsmouth South*)

[Gill Furniss MP](#) (*Labour, Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough*)

[Ben Howlett MP](#) (*Conservative, Bath*)

[Jess Phillips MP](#) (*Labour, Birmingham, Yardley*)

[Mr Gavin Shuker MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Luton South*)

The following members were also members of the committee during the Parliament:

[Siobhain McDonagh MP](#) (*Labour, Mitcham and Morden*)

[Tulip Siddiq](#) (*Labour, Hampstead and Kilburn*)

[Cat Smith](#) (*Labour, Lancaster and Fleetwood*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities and by in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the relevant [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Judith Boyce (Clerk), Sharmini Selvarajah (Second Clerk), Emma Sawyer (Committee Specialist), Asaad Qadri (Inquiry Manager), Thomas Pudlo (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant), Liz Parratt (Media Officer), and Rosie Tate (Media Officer).

The following staff also worked for the Committee during this inquiry: Gosia McBride (Clerk), Luanne Middleton (Second Clerk), and Kelly Barr (Hansard Scholar Intern).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Women and Equalities Committee, House of Commons, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6123; the Committee's email address is womeqcom@parliament.uk.

Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	5
Background	5
Our inquiry	6
1 The scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools	7
The scale of the problem	7
How common is sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?	7
Survey data on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools	7
Qualitative evidence	8
Personal testimony	9
The normalisation of sexual harassment and sexual violence	10
Victims and perpetrators	11
Impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools	12
Is sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools increasing?	13
Conclusions	14
2 Current strategies for dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools	16
How well are schools currently dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence?	16
Dealing with sexting and online harassment	17
National and International Obligations	18
Measures currently in place to deal with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools	19
Keeping Children Safe in Education	19
Guidance on bullying	21
The need for a national solution	22
A whole school approach	23
Conclusions	24
3 Recording data and monitoring good practice	26
Data recording	26
Under-reporting by teachers and schools	26
Lack of guidance on recording and reporting	27
Police data collection	28
Improving data collection	28

Monitoring good practice	29
The role of Ofsted	29
The Independent Schools Inspectorate	30
4 Educating children and young people	32
The role of PSHE and SRE	32
The current situation	32
The quality of SRE and PSHE	33
SRE can be an effective tool	34
When should SRE start?	34
Should PSHE/SRE be made statutory?	35
Support for statutory PSHE/SRE	36
The ministerial response	37
Delivering high quality SRE	37
Teacher training	38
Engaging boys and young men	39
5 Parents have a central role	42
The role of parents	42
Specialist support and interventions	44
6 Tackling the impact of pornography	46
Access to pornography	46
The impact of pornography on children	47
How should pornography be dealt with?	48
Better education	49
Age restrictions	50
Conclusions and recommendations	52
Annex: Terms of Reference	57
Formal Minutes	59
Witnesses	60
Published written evidence	61
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	64

Summary

This inquiry has uncovered the scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools across England which must be acted upon urgently. The evidence we have gathered paints a concerning picture: the sexual harassment and abuse of girls being accepted as part of daily life; children of primary school age learning about sex and relationships through exposure to hard-core pornography; teachers accepting sexual harassment as being “just banter”; and parents struggling to know how they can best support their children.

Despite this evidence and existing legislation, the Government has no coherent plan to ensure schools tackle the causes or consequences of sexual harassment and sexual violence. There are some examples of excellent work being done by schools and third sector organisations to prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence. But too many schools are failing their pupils in this area. The Government must take a lead and ensure that every school understands that sexual harassment and sexual violence is neither acceptable nor an inevitable part of school life. It must always be dealt with appropriately. Schools, teachers and parents want and need better support and guidance in order to achieve this.

Some of the sexual harassment uncovered through this inquiry may not reach the threshold for criminal activity. However, it does create an environment for children and young people that we find deeply troubling. “Low level” sexual harassment has negative effects on the individuals involved. It must also be addressed in order to prevent an escalation into criminal abuse and harassment.

This report examines sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and its impact on children and young people aged up to 18 years old. Our recommendations focus on preventing harassment and violence. We recognise that throughout puberty young people are grappling with their sexuality and it is inevitable that this will manifest itself at school. But this is no reason to accept sexual harassment or abuse as part of school life. It is essential that schools support young people and ensure that they provide safe environments for all students to learn in.

Whilst schools have a critical role to play in reducing levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence, it is important to recognise that children and young people spend most of their time outside school. Any solution to the problem of sexual harassment and sexual violence must therefore support parents to fulfil their responsibilities in this area.

It is essential that boys and young men are not demonised as perpetrators of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Most young men are respectful of young women and each other. As we note throughout this report, boys and young men are an important part of the solution and are adversely impacted themselves by a culture of internet pornography that has become so prevalent amongst young people. The findings of this report suggest that if the Government is to tackle “lad culture” successfully at university, its work should start much earlier, in schools.

We welcome the Government's recognition of the scale of the problem of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and look forward to immediate action to implement our recommendations. The Government should:

- Use the new Education Bill to create an obligation on every Governing Body to take appropriate action to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual violence. Clear national guidance and support must be developed to help achieve this effectively through a 'whole school approach'. This involves teachers, governors, school leaders, parents, young people and specialist sector organisations working together.
- Require Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate to assess schools on how well they are recording, monitoring, preventing and responding to incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence.
- Ensure every child at primary and secondary school has access to high quality, age-appropriate relationships and sex education delivered by well-trained individuals. This can only be achieved by making sex and relationships education (SRE) a statutory subject; investing in teacher training; working with sexual violence specialists to update SRE guidance; ensuring teachers have access to appropriate materials; and investing in local third sector specialist support.

These achievable actions, taken together, could help to significantly reduce the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. By immediately implementing them, the Government will be demonstrating its commitment towards empowering and protecting a generation of children and young people.

Introduction

Background

1. Data published in September 2015 showed that 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three-year period, including 600 rapes.¹ A 2010 YouGov poll of 16–18 year olds found 29% of girls experienced unwanted sexual touching at school and a further 71% of 16–18-year-olds said they heard sexual name-calling such as “slut” or “slag” towards girls at school daily or a few times per week. Nearly a quarter (24%) said that their teachers never said unwanted sexual touching, sharing of sexual pictures or sexual name calling are unacceptable, and 40% said they did not receive lessons or information on sexual consent.²

2. In 2015 Girlguiding UK found that 75% of girls and young women said anxiety about potentially experiencing sexual harassment affects their lives in some way. The same survey found that 90% of young women aged 13–21 agreed that the Government should make sure all schools are addressing sexual harassment and bullying in schools.³

3. Despite evidence that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is affecting the lives of girls and young women, the issue has received relatively little national attention prior to the launch of this inquiry. It has not been addressed by the UK Government to date, although it is an issue on which the Welsh Government has taken action. Whilst some schools and specialist organisations are doing excellent work in this area, too often incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence are ignored or receive an inadequate response.

4. Throughout this report we use the following definitions:

- Sexual harassment: ‘Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature’. A fuller range of behaviours is set out in the recent survey on violence against women by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.⁴
- Sexual violence: In ‘Surviving Sexual Violence’, Professor Liz Kelly defines sexual violence as including “...any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact.”⁵ It should be noted that men and boys also experience sexual harassment and sexual violence.
- Children and young people: In this report we are specifically referring to those under the age of 18 as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5. The evidence we have gathered shows sexual harassment and sexual violence operate on a continuum. Tackling sexual harassment in its early stages can prevent more serious forms of sexual offence. A 2013 Joint Inspectorate study of young sex offenders found that in almost half of the cases there was documented evidence of the young men and boys

1 BBC [School sex crime reports in UK top 5,500 in three years](#) 6 September 2015

2 End Violence Against Women [Poll Results](#) October 2010

3 Girlguiding UK [Girls’ Attitude Survey 2015](#)

4 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [Violence Against Women an EU Survey](#), 2014

5 Liz Kelly *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Polity, 1988)

exhibiting previous “concerning sexualised behaviour” that was either not identified at the time or was subject to disbelief, minimisation and denial by professionals and families—crucially missing the opportunity to intervene and prevent abuse.⁶

Our inquiry

6. Our inquiry was launched in April 2016; the terms of reference are included in the annex of this report. We received 92 written submissions from individuals and organisations, 77 of which were published. 15 submissions, some of which included personal details of incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence, have not been published. However, some unpublished submissions are referred to anonymously in this report and all submissions were considered in reaching our conclusions and recommendations.

7. During this inquiry we held five oral evidence sessions. The transcript of the first session, in which we heard from young people aged between 13 and 18 who are currently still in school, has been anonymised. We are grateful to the NSPCC, UK Feminista and Tender for facilitating the session. We also held a roundtable session with a range of experts working directly with young people in schools; a session with Ofsted, the National Union of Teachers, the National Council of Police Chiefs, and Welsh Women’s Aid; a session focusing on boys and young men; and a session with Government ministers.

8. We are grateful to everyone who submitted written evidence, attended oral evidence sessions and contributed to this inquiry. We are especially grateful to those individuals who took the time to share their personal, and often harrowing, experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence in school. We also thank Fixers, for their scoping work for the inquiry launch, and Girlguiding UK for hosting the report’s publication. Finally, we are very grateful to our specialist advisors, Holly Dustin⁷ and Dr Christine Barter,⁸ for their assistance throughout the inquiry and report writing process.

9. This report seeks to understand the scale of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, as well as its causes and effects. It will examine how adequately schools and other stakeholders are currently dealing with the issue and make practical, evidence-based recommendations to improve the situation. The report also focuses on prevention, and the most effective strategies to ensure children develop the ability to form healthy, consensual relationships.

10. The first chapter will examine the scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. The report will then go on to assess the mechanisms currently in place for recording and responding to these incidents. The role of education in preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence will be examined, as well as the role of parents and specialist sector organisations. Finally, we examine the impact increased access to pornography is having on young people’s perceptions of sex, relationships, consent and gender.

6 [Rape Crisis South London \(SVS0076\)](#)

7 No relevant interests declared.

8 No relevant interests declared.

1 The scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools

The scale of the problem

How common is sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?

11. There is no centralised data collection of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Under-reporting, and a lack of consistency in schools reporting sexual assault to the police and other authorities, also makes it hard to establish a definitive picture of levels of sexual violence in schools.

12. Data collected by the BBC in 2015 found that 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three year period, including 600 rapes.⁹ However, the journalist who gathered this data said that problems with how data is recorded and a reluctance to record incidents means:

I personally believe the...data I collected and collated from nearly all UK police forces reflects the tip of the iceberg in relation to sexual harassment in UK schools.¹⁰

We assess current data recording and reporting mechanisms further in Chapter 3.

Survey data on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools

13. Despite the lack of centralised data on incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the extent of this problem through the extensive quantitative and qualitative data submitted to this inquiry. A number of large scale surveys find girls and young women consistently reporting high levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in school:

- 59% of girls and young women aged 13–21 said in 2014 that they had faced some form of sexual harassment at school or college in the past year.¹¹
- Almost a third (29%) of 16–18-year-old girls say they have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school.¹²
- 41% of UK girls aged 14 to 17 who reported an intimate relationship experienced some form of sexual violence from their partner.¹³
- 22% of young girls aged 7–12 have experienced jokes of a sexual nature from boys.¹⁴

9 [BBC School sex crime reports in UK top 5,500 in three years](#) 6 September 2015

10 [Ms Claire Savage \(SVS0083\)](#) para 1

11 [Girlguiding UK Girls' Attitudes Survey 2014](#) December 2014

12 [End Violence Against Women Poll Results](#) October 2010

13 [Connect Centre \(SVS0024\)](#)

14 [Girlguiding \(SVS0061\)](#) para 10

- Nearly three-quarters (71%) of all 16–18-year-olds (boys and girls) say they hear sexual name-calling with terms such as “slut” or “slag” used towards girls at schools on a daily basis or a few times a week.¹⁵
- 28% of 16–18-year-olds say they have seen sexual pictures on mobile phones at school a few times a month or more.¹⁶

14. Teaching unions also raised concerns about levels of sexual harassment in school. In 2016 the NASUWT survey¹⁷ included a section on sexualised incidents and bullying between pupils for the first time. Teachers reported:

- Pupils filming themselves masturbating and sharing images.
- Girls taking nude pictures of themselves and sending them to older boys.
- Regular incidents of girls sending nude pictures to their boyfriends who then forward the images on to their friends.

Qualitative evidence

15. This survey data is backed up by extensive qualitative evidence. Laura Bates from the Everyday Sexism Project observed that:

Our project entries and my interactions with pupils across the country strongly support [the BBC] statistics—this is a widespread, regular and common problem. It doesn’t affect every child but it is something that the majority of girls are experiencing, and is widespread even in its most severe forms.¹⁸

16. A focus group by Brook in the Wirral found that the problem begins in primary school, with young people reporting that:

Sexual harassment in primary and secondary schools occurs “multiple times a day”, “lots”, “quite a lot”, and “definitely happens in primary school, especially in year 5 and 6”, with the activities occurring in years 5–6 listed as “Lifting up skirts and pulling down pants” and “Some kids [being] scared to wear skirts.”¹⁹

17. Research by Public Health Bristol City Council²⁰ confirms these findings. Young people from school years 9–11 (aged between 13 and 16) said that:

- Sexual bullying, sexism and harassment are normalised, everyday occurrences, often positioned as “a joke” and therefore not reported.
- There is significant pressure on boys to prove their masculinity through objectifying and teasing girls.

15 End Violence Against Women [Poll Results](#) October 2010.

16 Ibid

17 [NASUWT](#) (SVS0072) para 25

18 [Everyday Sexism Project](#) (SVS0077)

19 [Brook](#) (SVS0055)

20 [Public Health Bristol City Council](#) (SVS0044)

- Over half the young people questioned said calling people names (slut/bitch/gay); pestering people to go out with you; and shouting things about someone's appearance happened in their primary schools.

Personal testimony

18. We received a number of submissions outlining incidents of sexual violence and harassment that had occurred within schools. These included evidence from the parent of a girl who had been sexually assaulted and harassed throughout primary and secondary school; the parent of a young woman sexually assaulted by a male peer and who struggled to gain any support from the school; and the parent of an 11 year old girl sexually assaulted and blackmailed by male peers at school.

19. Young people who gave evidence to us noted the ubiquity of sexual harassment in school:

I guess the thing that people would say they see the most, and we see as well, is slapping of bums and flicking [lifting up] of skirts. That is a common thing that people see in schools. There is also derogative term calling—calling women bitches and stuff like that—which is also a common thing that you see in school, on a daily basis really.²¹

You see it every day in my school. I wouldn't say it was appropriate, but it still happens.²²

20. We also received anonymous evidence from teachers and other school staff concerned about levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence at their schools and inadequate responses to this behaviour. One Birmingham teacher told us:

I have had many young girls sobbing and humiliated in my office because partially naked images have gone viral. I have seen girls being threatened with those images going viral if they chose not to perform sexual acts on a boy. I have seen girls have to leave school because of the bullying they received from their naked images going viral. I know of pupils, boys and girls, who have been sexually assaulted and felt too ashamed to come forward and tell an adult.²³

A lunchtime supervisor at a middle school explained how prevalent sexual harassment was in her school:

In the Year Eight and Seven playground I hear constant sexual language particularly from the boys. I have witnessed boys being very rough with girls... The girls seem resigned to this treatment and when I have spoken to them about it they say none of the teachers listen. If I challenge the boys they seem to feel it is acceptable and just "banter."²⁴

21 Q37 Student K

22 Q43 Student J

23 Birmingham school teacher (SVS0030)

24 Anonymous written submission (SVS0005)

The normalisation of sexual harassment and sexual violence

21. As the testimony above demonstrates, there is a problem with sexual harassment being dismissed as “just teasing” by a “boys will be boys” culture.²⁵ This issue came up strongly in our evidence session with young people. As one girl told us:

The thing is that [boys] don't see it as harassment. They just see it as being with their friends, having fun, calling girls “sluts”—stuff like that. So whereas the girl may feel upset or less confident, they see it as, “I'm just having fun with my friends if I slap a girl's bum.” ...So if a teacher says, “What are you doing?” and tells them to stop, they are just like, “I'm just playing around, Miss.”²⁶

Other young people told us that teachers often do not take incidents of sexual harassment seriously:

I don't feel that it is really dealt with. If a teacher sees it, they will say, “Oh, you shouldn't say that,” and then it will be forgotten about really easily and no action will be taken about what happened.²⁷

Teachers should be a little more aware of what sexual harassment is and how sometimes, even if it seems like the boys and girls are playing, it can be sort of demeaning. They need to be aware of what it is and how it can affect people.²⁸

22. The normalisation of sexual harassment and violence is described in evidence submissions from academics working in this area, including Dr Vanita Sundaram of York University. She refers to a range of research demonstrating the prevalence of “lad culture” from a very young age:

Research with 13–18 year olds suggests that young people trivialise and justify violence against women and girls, view some forms of sexual harassment as normal and even inevitable and excuse rape. Teenagers excuse sexual assault and rape in certain circumstances, including when girls/women are viewed as having behaved ‘inappropriately’ in relation to a male friend, acquaintance, partner or ex-partner.²⁹

23. The Addressing Sexual Bullying Across Europe (ASBAE) Project, which interviewed young people across five EU countries between 2013–2015 found sexual harassment was often taken for granted:

It became apparent that, whilst sexual bullying was widespread, the young people had previously accepted most sexual bullying behaviours as just a ‘normal’ part of their everyday lives. ...The findings from the professionals further supported this...viewing sexual bullying as a widespread problem that had become normalised by young people, and suggesting that the ubiquity made it difficult for young people to identify problematic behaviours as sexual bullying.³⁰

25 [Dr Andrea Richardson](#) (SV50094) para 6

26 Q6

27 Q25

28 Q33

29 [Dr Vanita Sundaram](#) (SV50042) para 6

30 [ASBAE Project](#) (SV50017) para 16

The researchers also noted that this normalisation of sexual harassment and abuse makes it less likely that victims will identify behaviour as abusive and are therefore unlikely to report it.

Victims and perpetrators

24. There is strong evidence that young women are more likely to be targets of sexual harassment and sexual violence than young men. Analysis by the Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm concludes that “the impact of sexual victimisation within young people’s relationships appears gendered: girls report higher rates and a greater negative impact compared to boys.”³¹

25. Their research found that, of the 80% of young people who reported having some form of intimate partner, 31% of girls and 16% of boys reported some form of sexual violence from a partner. A subsequent study in 2015 found UK rates of 41% for girls and 14% for boys respectively. In both studies most young people reported being subjected to emotional pressure rather than physical force.³²

26. The Centre for Gender Equal Media also noted that:

Young women and girls are still overwhelmingly the target for sexual violence and harassment online. The perpetrators of all forms of online sexual harassment are most frequently young men, meaning a gendered approach to prevention is required.³³

27. The Growing Against Sexual Violence project, which delivers workshops to equal numbers of young men and women, also finds that young women are disproportionately the victims of sexual exploitation. In their work, they found that girls and young women made up 93% of child sexual exploitation (CSE) related disclosures in 2012–13 and 87% of CSE related disclosures in 2013–14.³⁴

28. However, although there is clear evidence that girls and young women are most likely to be victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence, it is important to recognise that boys and young men can also be victims. As the Youth Justice Board noted:

Statistically, girls and women are more likely to experience harassment, violence and abuse. However, it is widely believed that the numbers of boys and men experiencing abuse is heavily underreported. The Children’s Commissioner’s 2015 report highlighted that boys and young men are less likely to be identified and perceived as victims.³⁵

29. The Youth Justice Board is also one of several organisations pointing out that disabled young people are much more likely to be the victims of sexual abuse than others. This point is also raised by the Anti-Bullying Alliance:

31 [Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm, University of Central Lancashire \(SVS0024\)](#)

32 Ibid

33 Hill, C., & Kearn, H. (2011) [Crossing the line: Sexual harassment at school](#)

34 [Growing Against Violence \(SVS0022\)](#)

35 [Youth Justice Board for England and Wales \(SVS0031\)](#) para 4.4

Disabled children and those with special educational needs are at particular risk of sexual abuse. A report for the NSPCC also showed that children and young people with learning disabilities were over-represented when researching children and young people that display harmful sexual behaviour. It is important to be aware that disabled children and those with special educational needs report the highest levels of both severe and physical bullying in schools and are therefore likely to be a high risk group in relation to sexual violence in schools.³⁶

30. Other groups of young people are also particularly affected by sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. The issue of LGBTI bullying and harassment was raised by a number of respondents to this inquiry and should be acknowledged as a significant issue, though beyond the scope of this report.

31. The differential impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence on young people from black and ethnic minority (BME) backgrounds must also be recognised. As Marai Larasai from Imkaan told us:

One issue that we also need to be mindful of is that different groups of girls experience sexual harassment in different ways. BME girls are much more likely to be called names that are racialised—things like “black bitch”.³⁷

Victim Support also told us it has “noted an increase in sexual harassment and violence against Muslim girls in the wake of national, high profile cases of child sexual exploitation involving male Muslim perpetrators.”³⁸

Impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools

32. Girlguiding UK’s 2015 survey found that three quarters of girls aged between 11 and 21 say anxiety about experiencing sexual harassment negatively affects their lives in some way—from what they wear and where they go to how they feel about their bodies.³⁹

33. It can also have an impact on girls’ participation in class, as noted by UK Feminista, who point out that 25% of 11 to 16 year old girls say that concerns over potential sexual harassment make them consider whether or not to speak out in class.⁴⁰

34. Members of the ATL teaching union reported some of the consequences of sexual harassment that they had observed.⁴¹ These included:

- girls being “even more unwilling to take risks even in academic areas”
- girls being less likely to participate in activities and “do anything that will make them stand out and attract attention”
- girls being more self-conscious about appearance “and not appearing too geeky”
- sexual harassment “taking up a lot of teacher time.”

36 [Anti-Bullying Alliance National Children’s Bureau](#) (SVS0018) para 1.7

37 Q104 Marai Larasi

38 [Victim Support](#) (SVS0073)

39 [Girlguiding UK Girls’ Attitude Survey 2015](#)

40 [UK Feminista](#) (SVS0029) para 15

41 [Association of Teachers and Lecturers](#) (SVS 0071) para 6

35. In their research with over 1,000 young people across the UK, arts organisation Tender found sexual harassment and violence had an impact on both genders:

The impact of sexual violence on victims was described as reducing levels of self-esteem, confidence and ability to concentrate in class; with reference to perpetrators, reduced levels of empathy was observed, and in both boys and girls an increase in the normalising and acceptance of a range of violent behaviours.⁴²

36. Other impacts of sexual harassment at school have been identified as: post-traumatic stress disorder; self-harm; isolation and withdrawal; substance use; sexually transmitted diseases; depression and anxiety; and lack of attendance at school.⁴³

Is sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools increasing?

37. As noted above and in Chapter 3, there is limited data to show the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. More generally, there is evidence of an 88% increase in the number of child sexual exploitation offences being reported to police over a four year period. Around a third of the child sexual abuse offences reported to the police relate to alleged perpetrators under 18 years old and therefore can be potentially categorised as ‘peer on peer’ abuse.⁴⁴

38. An increase in reports may show a positive shift in the propensity to report incidents, rather than an increase in prevalence. However, Chief Constable Simon Bailey, the national policing lead for child protection and abuse investigations, said he believes that there is also an increase in sexual offences against children:

A rise in actual child sexual abuse offending...is being predominantly driven by the online world and the opportunities which this is presenting to potential offenders.⁴⁵

39. An increase in the number of young women seeking support after sexual harassment and sexual violence is also reported by Rape Crisis South London.

Within our own organisation, we have seen an increase in the number of young women under 18 seeking specialist support through the national rape and sexual abuse helpline and both our counselling and advocacy services. Collectively, the young women’s experiences of sexual violence have included; rape (anal, oral and vaginal), sexual assault, grooming (face to face and online), sexual abuse and sexual harassment (including being sent pornography). Recent police data at the end of March 2015 also showed 30% of recorded rapes were committed against girls under the age of 16.⁴⁶

42 [Tender Education and Arts](#) (SVS0084)

43 See [UK Feminista](#) (SVS0029), [The University of Bedfordshire](#) (SVS0065) and [Girlguiding UK](#) (SVS0061)

44 [Simon Bailey National Police Chiefs’ Council](#) (SVS0092) para 8

45 *Ibid* para 7

46 [Rape Crisis South London](#) (SVS0076) para 40

40. Practice-based evidence from those working in schools suggests there may be an increase in sexual violence and sexual harassment, facilitated by technology and social media. The link between pornography and sexual violence was a consistent theme amongst expert witnesses and is discussed further in Chapter 6.

41. In their research with members, the ATL teaching union found that:

Nearly 40% of education staff say young people they work with have viewed pornography, and half have noticed an increase in sexually explicit conversations among pupils in the last five years.⁴⁷

42. Big Talk Education have also seen an increase in younger pupils exhibiting sexually inappropriate behaviour at school:

It was about twelve years ago that we first started to receive referrals regarding sexual inappropriate behaviour amongst pupils in a Primary School. Since then we have seen a steady increase and deal with approximately 1 or 2 referrals a week. ...We do believe that this is the tip of the iceberg and because of the cost implication pupils/students are only referred to us when schools feel out of their depth.⁴⁸

43. Some contributors to this inquiry have argued that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is no more common today than in the past. Dr Andrea Richardson said that:

The role of online pornography is cited as a key contributory factor for this kind of harassing behaviour. In fact, such behaviour was commonplace long before such online materials were available...I attended primary school from 1990–1997 and the practice of boys pulling up girls' skirts to reveal their underwear was extremely commonplace at this time, in my school, and others in the area.⁴⁹

44. However, many other experts argued that access to pornography has changed the culture in schools and young people's perceptions of sex, relationships and consent. We assess the evidence for this in Chapter 6.

Conclusions

45. **Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is a significant issue which affects a large number of children and young people, particularly girls, across the country. Evidence shows that the majority of perpetrators of this abuse are boys, and the majority of victims are girls. However it is essential that the negative impact on both boys and girls is recognised and addressed.**

46. **There is insufficient data to conclusively demonstrate that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is a growing problem. It is true that such behaviour has occurred in schools for many years, as in wider society. However, significant qualitative**

47 [Association of Teachers and Lecturers \(SVS 0071\)](#)

48 [Big Talk Education \(SVS0048\)](#)

49 [Dr Andrea Richardson \(SVS0094\)](#)

evidence suggests that increasing access to pornography and technological advances, including online platforms, can facilitate harassment and violence and thus exacerbate the problem.

47. Teachers, parents, young people and third sector organisations are telling us that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is having an impact on young people and school life. Consequences include: physical and emotional harm, including teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; girls feeling unable to fully participate in educational and extra-curricular opportunities; teachers spending valuable time dealing with incidents of sexual harassment and bullying; and young people developing a sense that sexual harassment and sexual violence are acceptable behaviours and learning social norms that are carried through to adult life.

48. *The Government and schools must make tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence an immediate policy priority.*

2 Current strategies for dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools

How well are schools currently dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence?

49. We have received evidence from teachers, parents, third sector organisations and young people suggesting that many schools are currently failing to adequately respond to and prevent incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence in the school environment. Many schools are also failing to support students experiencing these issues outside of school.

50. A number of parents submitted written evidence to us outlining how sexual harassment and sexual violence had been dealt with by their children's schools. One parent, whose six year old daughter was sexually assaulted by peers at school, told us:

It took the school 8 days to permanently exclude the boys. The head teacher literally had to jump through hoops to achieve it. Our daughter was never interviewed by a social worker. Instead the head teacher had to do the initial interview, with us, her parents conducting a more detailed interview.⁵⁰

She went on to explain how the head subsequently apologised to the family, saying the school had simply not been prepared to look out for peer-on-peer sexual abuse at such a young age. The whole experience led this parent to conclude that:

Schools aren't supported ...when [sexual abuse] is discovered. There was no support to the head teacher to know what to do, and no one was willing to support her to make our daughter safe. Everyone was 'hands off'.⁵¹

51. Teachers also gave us their personal testimony regarding a lack of action by many schools in this area:

I have never received clear guidelines, from any of the schools that I have taught at, on how to deal with sexual harassment by pupils. I have reported incidents that have been quietly dealt with by the pastoral team, but I have never seen disciplinary consequences issued as a result of reporting such incidents.⁵²

52. This personal testimony is supported by research cited by the International Centre Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking at the University of Bedfordshire. It noted that:

Education providers often lack the knowledge and confidence to deal with incidents of sexual violence, and are not currently responding to sexual

50 Anonymous written evidence submission (SVS0082)

51 Ibid

52 Anonymous evidence submission (SVS0009)

violence as a whole-school issue at an institutional level. Instead, school responses depend on individual ‘champions’ on the issues, with many schools reluctant to talk about, or address, sexual violence in policies and teaching.⁵³

53. The lack of a coherent approach to addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools was raised in evidence from other academics and third sector organisations:

Many young people in our research reported they did not trust the school staff enough to report abuse and harassment. 50% said they thought teachers would not take it seriously. (Against Violence and Abuse)⁵⁴

While there are isolated examples of individual schools or teachers who are doing an excellent job at being aware of the problem, highlighting and tackling it, these are rare. (Everyday Sexism Project)⁵⁵

We know from our experience that schools often lack the confidence to discuss and engage with the wide range of issues connected to sexual violence and sexual harassment. (Victim Support)⁵⁶

54. Susie McDonald from Tender emphasised the need for better training for teachers in identifying sexual harassment:

Many teachers are victim-blaming at the moment. They are looking at sexual harassment as horseplay or something going on in the corridors that they are not recognising as a problem. Until they are effectively trained to understand what is at the root of the issue, they will not be able to make the right judgments about how they can deliver training and education within their schools.⁵⁷

55. **Schools lack the guidance, training and structures to deal with incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Too often such incidents are brushed aside by staff and not taken sufficiently seriously by school leaders.** There is compelling evidence that a whole school approach, which we discuss further below, can begin to address these issues.

Dealing with sexting and online harassment

56. Research by Ofsted in March 2015,⁵⁸ found less than half of schools had implemented an acceptable policy for technology in school and only a quarter of secondary students recalled being taught about online safety in the last 12 months. Overall, training for teachers in this area was found to be inconsistent.

57. Teachers have raised the issue of poor guidance in this area as contributing to the problem. The NASUWT referred to current guidance to schools on sexting and online harassment as being “woefully inadequate”, and called for the Government to “send a clear message that those who seek to abuse, harass and threaten staff and pupils through the use of social media and mobile phones will face serious sanctions.”⁵⁹

53 [The University of Bedfordshire](#) (SVS0065) para 14

54 [AVA Against Violence and Abuse](#) (SVS0079)

55 [Everyday Sexism Project](#)

56 [Victim Support](#) (SVS0073)

57 [Susie McDonald Q106](#)

58 [Ofsted reveals new ‘Online Safety in Schools’ survey](#) July 2015

59 [NASUWT](#) (SVS0072) para 10

The NUT also called on the Department for Education to “provide clear, practical guidance to schools and colleges on the legal aspects of managing sexting and ways in which learners can be protected and supported.”⁶⁰

58. Other NUT recommendations in this area included:

- Providing all staff with information and professional development opportunities to help them understand, prevent, and respond to cyberbullying, sexting incidents, and other e-safety issues.
- Making reporting routes clearer by making a nominated member of the senior management team take responsibility for overseeing e-safety within a school (including anti-cyberbullying activity and related incidents).

59. New guidance for schools on how to deal with sexting was launched by the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) in August 2016, and will be accompanied by guidance for police forces to be published in September. This guidance was developed in conjunction with the Home Office, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), the voluntary sector and local police forces. As the Government explained in its evidence, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) has also funded Childnet to update guidance for schools on cyberbullying, including policy on sexting, and how to deal appropriately with peer-on-peer abuse, and online abuse of others in the school community.⁶¹

60. We welcome the new sexting guidance for schools. However, guidance on specific areas of harassment is not sufficient to deal with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

National and International Obligations

61. There is an existing range of obligations on schools, the Government and other key bodies to address and prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

62. Domestic obligations include:

- The Public Sector Equality Duty (contained in the Equality Act 2010.)⁶² This shifts the focus of discrimination legislation from redressing discrimination and harassment once it has happened, to preventing it in the first place. Schools, government departments and other listed public authorities are subject to the Duty.
- Child protection legislation including the Children Act 1989.⁶³
- The Human Rights Act 1998⁶⁴ (including the Right to be free from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment).

60 [National Union of Teachers](#) (SVS0032)

61 [Department for Education](#) (SVS0088) para 23

62 [Equality Act 2010](#)

63 [Children Act 1989](#)

64 [Human Rights Act 1998](#)

63. International obligations include:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child⁶⁵. Relevant Articles include: Article 2 on equality, Article 19 on protection from violence, Articles 34 and 39 on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Recommendation 19 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women⁶⁶ and the Beijing Platform for Action.⁶⁷
- Istanbul Convention⁶⁸ (signed by the UK in 2012 but not yet ratified). Chapter III Prevention generally and Article 14 on education.
- Sustainable Development Goals—target 5.2 VAWG.⁶⁹

64. In addition to these domestic and international obligations, there are also existing Government strategies within which action to prevent and reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools could be taken. Prevention is one of the primary objectives of the Home Office’s Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) strategy.⁷⁰

65. There is a linked strategy⁷¹ to tackle child sexual exploitation at the launch of which, then Prime Minister David Cameron said “We are talking about sexual abuse being a national threat recognised by the police.”⁷² The Department for International Development has a full programme of work, including research, evaluation and funding on preventing sexual and other violence overseas.

Measures currently in place to deal with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools

66. The Government pointed to statutory Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance and new Ofsted guidance on bullying as key strategies for addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.⁷³

Keeping Children Safe in Education

67. The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) noted that:

The key current piece of statutory guidance for English schools in this area is the DfE’s “Keeping children safe in education”: statutory guidance for schools and colleges which all heads, teachers and governing bodies are obliged to have read.⁷⁴

65 United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 1989

66 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#), 1992

67 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, [Platform for Action: Violence Against Women](#), 1995

68 Council of Europe, [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), 2011

69 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [Sustainable Development Goals, Target 5.3](#), accessed 4 August 2016

70 HM Government, [Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016–2020](#), 2016

71 HM Government, [Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation](#), 2015

72 10 Downing Street, [New measures to tackle child sexual exploitation](#) Press release, March 2015

73 [Department for Education \(SV50088\)](#) paras 7,8, 16, 17

74 [End Violence Against Women Coalition \(SV50058\)](#) para 4.18

The Government noted in written evidence that “A new version of [this] guidance will be issued shortly” and that it will “address concerns that incidents of sexual harassment were not being taken seriously in some cases.”⁷⁵

68. However, a number of witnesses criticised the new draft guidance as being inadequate. The closest the 67-page document comes to addressing the question of sexual harassment and peer-on-peer sexual violence in school is a single paragraph which says:

Staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their overarching safeguarding policy and child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse and sets out how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with. These policies should reflect the different forms peer on peer abuse can take and in particular reflect the different gender issues that are often prevalent when dealing with peer on peer abuse.⁷⁶

69. The EAW Coalition said there are “huge failings” in the guidance as it currently stands:

This key, overarching, critical DfE document is the backbone of current frontline school policy...to sexual harassment and assault, yet it is empty of any specific, gendered instruction. It must be regarded as the key failing in current policy.⁷⁷

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) also noted that KCSIE “does not provide schools or colleges with sufficient guidance about what to do to mitigate the effects of sexual harassment and sexual violence, whether against teachers or peer-to-peer.”⁷⁸

70. Several organisations made recommendations as to how the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance can be improved to address the issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools:

- It could ensure all schools are clearly instructed to respect girls’ human rights and equality, in compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Revisions to KCSIE guidance should be made with the input of experts in violence against women and girls (EAW Coalition).
- Use KCSIE as a means to advance a holistic approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence by bringing together the various interventions already in place (The International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking, University of Bedfordshire).
- KCSIE should include direct reference to harmful sexual behaviour and be expanded to include sections on the different manifestations of online abuse (NSPCC).
- The guidance should refer to a whole school approach to tackling violence against women and girls and keeping children safe in schools (Girlguiding UK).

75 [Department for Education \(SV50088\)](#) para 8

76 [Draft: Keeping children safe in education Statutory guidance for schools and colleges](#), September 2016, para 86 accessed 27 July 2016

77 [End Violence Against Women Coalition \(SV50058\)](#) para 3.2

78 [National Union of Teachers \(SV50032\)](#)

71. The Minister for Children and Families, Edward Timpson MP, told us:

We are reviewing [KCSIE] again is because it cannot be a static document. ... We are further updating it and will have another revised version in September, which this Committee may have an opportunity to feed into.⁷⁹

72. **We welcome the fact that the Government has committed to further amending Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance. We are also encouraged that the Government has said the Committee may be able to feed into this. However, it is disappointing that it has taken this inquiry for the Government to address sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools within this key piece of statutory guidance.**

73. We recommend that Keeping Children Safe in Education should directly reference sexual harassment and sexual violence. It should refer schools to a whole school approach as the most effective means of tackling this problem. Specialists working in the field of sexual harassment and violence against women and girls should be consulted on the best ways to draft these revisions to KCSIE.

Guidance on bullying

74. In September 2015 a new Ofsted Inspections Framework for guidance on bullying was introduced. Under this, inspectors look at: “records and analysis of bullying, discriminatory and prejudicial behaviour, either directly or indirectly, including racist, disability and homophobic bullying, use of derogatory language and racist incidents.”⁸⁰

75. The omission of sexual harassment or sexist bullying within this framework was raised as a cause for concern by several organisations including UK Feminista. It argued that:

This sends out a harmful message that tackling sexual harassment is not a key priority.⁸¹

UK Feminista said sexual harassment should be included within the guidance and that Ofsted should request information demonstrating how a school is effectively tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence during inspections.

76. The NUT also supported including sexual harassment within the Ofsted guidance. As Rosamund McNeil, NUT Head of Education and Equality, told us:

We want schools to understand that sexism is absolutely as important as racism. The harm and the negative consequences are just as serious as from racist stereotypes, so it should be in there.⁸²

77. It is not just Ofsted that has neglected sexual harassment in its guidance on bullying. As UK Feminista noted:

The Department for Education’s guidance on tackling bullying in schools, ... provides a list of external organisations and resources available to support

79 Q242

80 Ofsted [School Inspection Handbook](#) August 2015 p16

81 [UK Feminista](#) (SV50029) para 20

82 Q183 Rosamund McNeil

schools to tackle racist, homophobic and disability-related bullying. However, the guidance does not include a single resource relating to sexism or sexual harassment in schools.⁸³

78. We were disappointed that Jane Millward, Ofsted Senior HMI, failed to acknowledge the need to include sexual harassment within Ofsted’s guidance on bullying when she appeared before us. However, it was positive to hear from the Minister for Children and Families that with a new Ofsted Chief Inspector coming in, there would be an opportunity to look at this issue and ensure “that teachers get a consistent message about what they should be doing and why it is important.”⁸⁴

79. **There is no reason why sexual harassment should not be included alongside racist, homophobic and disability-based bullying in Ofsted or Government guidance. We welcome the Minister’s commitment to raising this issue with Ofsted and look forward to both Ofsted and the Government’s guidance being amended urgently.**

80. *Ofsted and Government guidance on bullying should be amended immediately to include direct reference to sexual harassment and resources for how to deal with it.*

The need for a national solution

81. Amending existing guidance to schools as recommended above is an important step, but will not be successful on its own. Schools need to be given a clear obligation to address and prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence so the problem is dealt with consistently to a high standard.

82. During this inquiry, we have heard from the police, teachers, parents, students and specialists working in schools that there is significant variation in how schools deal with the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence. This inconsistency of approach is discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

83. Concern about schools’ inconsistent response to this issue was raised by the Minister for Children and Families:

What is absolutely clear is that there are some schools that get that and they appropriately deal with it and are successful, but there are schools that do not. That is the problem.⁸⁵

The Minister was clear that every school and every teacher must “understand what their responsibilities are and what to look for,” in addition to knowing how to “act in a way that is in the best interests of that child in that situation.”⁸⁶ However, he emphasised the importance of schools remaining autonomous in how this is achieved:

In terms of each individual school, what we do not do is micromanage and mandate every single aspect of how they fulfil their responsibilities, because no school is the same.⁸⁷

83 [UK Feminista](#) (SVS0029) para 19

84 Q258

85 Q251

86 *ibid*

87 Q252

84. The then Home Office Minister Karen Bradley MP raised a further concern about implementing a national strategy to reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools:

The problem with any national minimum standard is that sometimes it just hits the minimum and never goes above that...

That is why in the VAWG strategy we have a national statement of expectations, which is how we can work with local commissioners and local authorities and service delivery providers to say, “This is what we expect you to do but we want you to go beyond that wherever possible. This is not a minimum. This is what we are expecting; we would like you to go beyond it.”⁸⁸

85. There is overwhelming evidence that schools want, and need, clear national guidance on how to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence. We agree that different schools may wish to tackle the problem of sexual harassment and sexual violence in different ways. It is also important that, whilst all schools must meet national standards, they should be encouraged to surpass these expectations whenever possible.

A whole school approach

86. There was near consensus among experts who gave written or oral evidence to this inquiry on the importance of taking a ‘whole school approach’⁸⁹ to sexual harassment and sexual violence. Those supporting such an approach include: National Police Chiefs’ Council; Vera Baird QC, Northumbria PCC; AVA; the Women and Girls Network; NASUWT; NUT; Professor Emma Renold, Cardiff University; Public Health Bristol City Council; Rape Crisis England and Wales; the Connect Centre, University of Lancashire; Girlguiding UK; the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales; Plan International UK; Matthew Abraham, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University; and the National Union of Students.

87. UK Feminista described a whole school approach as involving “all members of the school community, including school governors, senior management, staff, students and parents.” It is “an over-arching framework, rather than a single policy, which ensures consistency across the entire learning environment.”⁹⁰

The EVAW coalition spelt out some of the key attributes of a whole school approach:

- That multiple school policies, including bullying, safeguarding, and equality, specifically address violence against women and girls. So, the bullying policy should recognise sexual bullying, and the equality policy should recognise that girls are in a hostile environment if sexual harassment is tolerated.
- The senior leadership team hold responsibility for building a zero tolerance culture towards abuse of girls in the school.

88 Q249 Karen Bradley

89 [AVA](#) have done significant work on developing this approach.

90 [UK Feminista](#) (SVS0029) para 5

- Links are established between schools and local support services for women and girls.
- Time is created within the curriculum for discussion of respect, equality and consent through compulsory Sex & Relationships Education.
- Girls and boys are included within the school's ongoing response to abuse.⁹¹

88. Professor Jessica Ringrose, UCL, Institute of Education suggested that a whole school approach to tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence should also address the sexism that underpins this behaviour. She argued that such an approach should include strategies for “dealing with everyday sexism across a wide spectrum in school including... sexist curriculum and pedagogy.”⁹²

89. Both the NUT and the NASUWT argued that better guidance is needed for schools to understand how best to implement a whole school approach to reducing sexual harassment and sexual violence. The NUT recommended that “the DfE improves its guidance on the inter-relation between behaviour and discipline, health and safety (including site security), and harassment and bullying processes.” It also emphasised the importance of all staff being aware of “what constitutes sexual harassment and violence, the procedures for reporting sexual harassment and violence, and how governing bodies and proprietors will respond to incidents of sexual harassment and violence.”⁹³

90. As the NSPCC noted, the Welsh Government can provide a useful model here:

The Government should also seek to incorporate learning from other parts of the UK. The Welsh Government has...taken action in conjunction with Women's Aid to encourage schools to develop whole education approaches by publishing a good practice guide which sets out nine key principles to help tackle violence against women and gender violence.⁹⁴

91. **Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools will only be reduced through a whole school approach. This must involve all staff, students, governors and parents, in addition to local child safeguarding bodies, police and specialist third sector organisations. Schools need guidance on how to implement this approach effectively. The Welsh Government offers a useful model for how this can be achieved.**

92. *The Department for Education should develop, publish and publicise national guidance on adopting a whole school approach to reducing and preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence in all primary and secondary schools. This guidance should be published so schools can implement it in September 2017.*

Conclusions

93. **It is clear that, in addition to amending current guidance, new legislation is needed to ensure tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence becomes a priority for all schools.**

91 [End Violence Against Women Coalition](#) (SVS0058) para 3.6

92 [UCL, Institute of Education](#) (SVS0041)

93 [National Union of Teachers](#) (SVS0032)

94 [NSPCC](#) (SVS0089) para 6.5

94. *The Government should create a statutory obligation in the forthcoming Education Bill for all schools, primary and secondary, to develop a whole school approach to preventing and tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence. We also recommend that the Department for Education remind all school Governors of their legal obligations to address sexual harassment and sexual violence in school. Guidance and support on how to achieve this most effectively should be provided to Governing Bodies.*

3 Recording data and monitoring good practice

Data recording

95. There is currently no centralised data collection of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Together with under-reporting and a lack of consistency in schools reporting sexual assault to the police and other authorities, this makes it hard to establish definitive data on levels of sexual violence and harassment in schools. Furthermore, accurate data is necessary for developing effective solutions to this problem.

Under-reporting by teachers and schools

96. We heard from parents about schools ignoring or avoiding recording and addressing incidents of harassment and sexual violence. One parent told us:

I would regularly speak to the school about the bullying but nothing ever seemed to change. We had no idea that the sexual abuse was taking place, she hid it from us for a long time. So when all of this came to our attention we were shocked, especially knowing we had spoken to the school regularly about the bullying.⁹⁵

One family, whose daughter attempted suicide aged 16 after she was raped by a peer when she was 13 and subsequently kept in the same class as him at school, raised their concerns about how information was recorded:

Record keeping of incidents, disclosures, and decisions taken by [our] school is extremely poor. There are many records which we would expect to have been created which do not exist.⁹⁶

97. In her research into responses to peer-on-peer abuse, Dr Carlene Firmin found that schools do not always refer incidents of sexual harassment to external agencies.⁹⁷ She argued that their reluctance to report such incidents is largely driven by two factors:

- (1) schools have tried to refer concerns regarding harmful sexual behaviour and have been informed that there is no service available to support them in addressing the issue
- (2) schools being unsure about where on the spectrum of sexual violence they should move beyond traditional sanctions and draw in external agencies.

98. In research on schools where rapes had occurred on their premises, Dr Firmin also found a reluctance to address an overall culture of sexual harassment. Instead, schools tended to focus their response on specific, individual cases.

95 Anonymous written evidence submission (SVS0011)

96 Anonymous written evidence submission (SVS0074)

97 Firmin, C.E. (2015) [Peer on Peer Abuse](#) University of Bedfordshire, and Firmin et al (Forthcoming, 2016) MsUnderstood Phase 1: University of Bedfordshire

There is little evidence that schools...sought help prior to the abusive incident. Most schools wanted support to manage the behaviour of individual students... rather than to alter the school environment itself.⁹⁸

99. Claire Savage, the BBC journalist who gathered the 2015 data on the number of sex crimes recorded in schools, warned that in her experience:

Schools were not aware of their statutory duty in referring these incidents to the police or the relevant safeguarding agency. This safeguarding officer [that I spoke to] was also of the opinion that some schools did not want to report these alleged crimes in case it deterred parents from sending their children to school.⁹⁹

Lack of guidance on recording and reporting

100. Many organisations told us that there was great variation between schools in how and whether they recorded incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence. In their work, Rape Crisis South London observed that:

There are large discrepancies and inconsistencies both within and across schools, in the recording and monitoring of sexual harassment and sexual violence. There is a lack of guidance for schools on what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and how this should be recorded and responded to.¹⁰⁰

101. The lack of consistency in how schools record incidents creates problems for the police, as explained by Chief Constable Simon Bailey of the NPCC:

[It] practically leads to difficulties when seeking to ascertain prevalence, share data and ultimately understand/respond to ongoing threats and emerging trends. It also presents gaps in [police forces'] understanding on how effective concerns are being dealt with by schools, [especially for cases] below the criminal threshold [that] do not come to our attention.¹⁰¹

102. A lack of clear national guidance and rules on data collection was seen as a significant problem by a number of organisations, including the NPCC, the Everyday Sexism Project and the Children's Society. The End Violence Against Women Coalition noted that current Preventing and Tackling Bullying guidance:

Provides no framework for monitoring equality issues and instructs schools to "exercise their own judgment" with regards to the recording of bullying incidents (even acknowledging that some schools "do not want to keep written records").¹⁰²

This makes it is very difficult to monitor schools' performance in these areas.

98 Firmin, C.E. (2015) [Peer on Peer Abuse](#) University of Bedfordshire,

99 [Claire Savage](#) (SVS0083)

100 [Rape Crisis South London](#) (SVS0076) para 2.10

101 [Simon Bailey National Police Chiefs' Council](#) (SVS0092) para 14

102 [EVAW submission to evidence check](#)

103. The importance of a multi-agency approach in recording and responding to sexual harassment and sexual violence was emphasised by several expert witnesses, including Rosamund McNeil from the NUT, and Gareth Edwards, Policy and Performance Officer, NPCC. As Gareth Edwards explained:

We would like to have more opportunities to have discussions with schools, other partners and inspectorates about concerns...alongside more serious incidents that require police intervention or safeguarding interventions outside school. We think there is definitely a lot of scope for looking at this in a bit more detail.¹⁰³

104. Gareth Edwards went on to describe the work of multi-agency safeguarding hubs which have shown evidence of being successful in this area:

They are multi-agency teams, often representing children's services and police, and in the better areas they will also have education, and possibly voluntary sector and health around the table. Effectively, they act as a front-door mechanism for child protection referrals and pulling together multi-agency information in that space, so that you can build up a robust assessment and decide what needs to be done.¹⁰⁴

Police data collection

105. Police sexual assault figures are recorded under these Home Office Offence Categories: Rape; Penetration; Sexual Assault; Sexual activity with a child; Exposure and Voyeurism. These categories only account for physically violent forms of sexual misconduct; harassment may amount to a criminal offence, but if it does not (sexual harassment often does not) then it is unlikely to be recorded by the police.

106. Claire Savage noted that police data does not currently record incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence according to whether they occur in a school or elsewhere.¹⁰⁵

107. *We recommend that police data record the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools specifically. This would allow for better analysis of the prevalence and increase/decrease of this problem.*

Improving data collection

108. During the course of this inquiry we heard a number of suggestions regarding how to improve data collection in this area. These included:

- The regular publication of data on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools alongside other crime statistics. (Claire Savage)¹⁰⁶
- Schools should use a standardised reporting and recording system for incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence. (Laura Bates, Everyday Sexism Project)¹⁰⁷

103 Q162

104 Q176

105 [Claire Savage](#) (SVS0083)

106 [Claire Savage](#) (SVS0083)

107 [Everyday Sexism Project](#) (SVS0077)

- Teachers must be trained in reporting and recording and given better guidance on when to report incidents to the police (Children’s Society).¹⁰⁸

109. One potential model for schools is the Government-initiated Taskforce on Sexual Harassment and Violence in Universities, which is due to report in the autumn. According to the EVAW coalition “many UK universities are moving towards specific monitoring of sexual harassment and assaults, and the Taskforce[...]is likely to recommend such monitoring for universal adoption.”¹⁰⁹

110. Understanding the scale, location and relative incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is key to addressing it. However, current data collection has been shown to be inadequate. Schools need better guidance on what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence; and how incidents should be recorded and reported. There is scope for improved cooperation between schools and other agencies, like the police, working in this area.

111. As part of the whole school approach guidance we have recommended, the Government should ensure all schools receive clear definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence. Schools also need information on how to record, monitor and respond to incidents, including when to report them to the police. All schools should collect this data. It should be collated nationally and published annually.

Monitoring good practice

The role of Ofsted

112. In September 2015 a new common inspection framework for all maintained schools and academies, non-association independent schools and further education and skills providers was introduced.¹¹⁰ Ofsted points out that “the framework states that [education providers] should be supporting children and learners’ understanding of how to keep themselves safe from risks such as abuse, sexual exploitation and extremism, including when using the internet and social media.”¹¹¹

113. The school inspection handbook also stipulates that, when visiting a school, inspectors will want to see evidence that young people possess an “...age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships and are confident in staying safe from abuse and exploitation.”¹¹²

114. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ofsted does not refer directly to sexual harassment or sexual violence in its current guidance to schools or inspectors. We welcome the Government’s assertion, discussed above, that Ofsted should reassess this guidance. However, as the NASUWT note, further training for inspectors in this area is also needed:

108 [The Children’s Society](#) (SV587)

109 [End Violence Against Women Coalition](#) (SV50058) para 3.9

110 All State-funded schools in England are inspected by Ofsted. Independent schools are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

111 [Ofsted](#) (SV50023)

112 Ofsted [School Inspection Handbook](#) September 2015

There are opportunities for Ofsted to inspect for effective policies and strategies that address sexual harassment and violence, however inspectorates need to be knowledgeable and fully trained on identifying good practices and gaps in provision.¹¹³

115. With the correct training, it would be possible for Ofsted to inspect schools on the basis of a whole school approach, as Rape Crisis England and Wales suggested:

Inspectors should be looking at how schools monitor and record incidents, whether they have adequate policies in place, whether they work with specialist agencies such as Rape Crisis Centres to deliver training, workshops and to provide support to survivors and crucially whether children feel safe at school and in the school environment. Ofsted can scrutinise school exclusions and disciplinary actions in relation to both perpetrators as well as to victim/survivors who may be punished for behaviour problems as a result of assault.¹¹⁴

116. Some concerns have been raised about Ofsted's ability to inspect schools adequately in this area. These included:

- The fact that not all schools are inspected: Under the current inspection regime, schools judged to be outstanding are exempt from routine inspection.
- The infrequency and brevity of school inspections: Under the new inspection regime, schools judged to be good can expect to be inspected approximately every three years, but this would be a "short inspection".

117. It should be noted that, despite shorter inspections, under the new Ofsted inspection regime the effectiveness of safeguarding will always be assessed.

118. We agree with the majority of experts we heard from that Ofsted should be monitoring State-funded schools' actions in preventing and tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence and supporting survivors. It is already tasked with inspecting how adequately schools are safeguarding pupils and has a well-established school inspection regime in place.

119. *In order for Ofsted to successfully monitor schools' progress in this area, it must update its training and guidance by September 2017 so all schools are inspected on how effectively they are preventing and dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence.*

The Independent Schools Inspectorate

120. ISI is a government-approved body which inspects independent schools. It says that:

Safeguarding is at the heart of all ISI inspections. This involves checking whether schools are compliant with the minimum standards required, not only in terms of policies and procedures but, importantly, in what they do. Liaison with the local authority safeguarding leads and the DfE about safeguarding issues is a key feature of our work.¹¹⁵

113 [NASUWT \(SVS0072\)](#) para 9

114 [Rape Crisis England and Wales \(SVS0059\)](#) para 4.4

115 [ISI website](#) accessed 31 July 2016

121. New standards for independent school inspections came into force in January 2015 following a serious case review into allegations of peer on peer abuse at an independent residential school in Hampshire in 2013. The Government said:

The revisions strengthen the standards on pupil welfare, health and safety, to focus on outcomes rather than processes. For instance they require that the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by having a written behaviour policy that is effectively implemented, and that bullying is prevented in the school, as far as reasonably practical, by drawing up and implementing an effective anti-bullying strategy.¹¹⁶

122. Under the new standards the Department for Education (DfE) can also take direct action against schools if children’s welfare is not being promoted, including “applying to a magistrate’s court for the immediate closure of a school if a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.”¹¹⁷

123. We welcome the new standards the Government has implemented for safeguarding children’s welfare in independent schools. However, these changes do not directly address the continuum of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

124. *The obligation on schools to prevent and address sexual harassment and sexual violence that we called for in paragraph 94 must include independent schools.* Inspection of this requirement would fall to ISI.

¹¹⁶ [Department for Education \(SVS0088\)](#) para 12

¹¹⁷ *Ibid* para 13

4 Educating children and young people

125. Sexual harassment and sexual violence are society-wide problems and should be addressed as such. However, many witnesses emphasised that schools have a significant contribution to make towards their reduction. As the International Centre Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking notes:

Schools can play an invaluable role in preventative education as they have the capacity to reach the largest number of children and young people. Preventative initiatives should start at primary school level and be delivered to both males and females in gender and age-appropriate forms. They should educate about risk and support, but also address perceptions that harmful behaviours are ‘normal’ or ‘appropriate’ in order to prevent young people from carrying out acts of sexual harmful behaviour¹¹⁸

126. We heard that Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), can play an important role in addressing and preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence as part of a whole school approach.

The role of PSHE and SRE

The current situation

127. The government refers to SRE as already compulsory in all maintained secondary schools, and a subject that primary schools can choose to teach. This is misleading. Only the biological aspects of sex education, and teaching about sexually transmitted diseases, are compulsory. As Ofsted noted:

It is compulsory for pupils in secondary schools to have sex education (not SRE) that includes HIV/AIDS and [Sexually Transmitted Infections] and sex education (not SRE) is statutory in science at key stages 1–3.¹¹⁹

The relationships aspect of SRE, and the teaching of sexual consent and gender equality, are not compulsory.

128. The PSHE Association noted that, according to Department for Education figures, the proportion of school hours allocated to PSHE has declined by over 21% in the last three years. It also cautioned that:

While maintained schools are required to teach SRE, there is no such requirement for academies. This means that, with more schools opting to become academies, expectations on schools in relation to sex and relationships education are in fact decreasing.¹²⁰

129. Any school that chooses to provide SRE has a statutory duty to have ‘due regard’ to the Secretary of State’s Sex and Relationship Education Guidance which was published in 2000 and has not been updated since. We discuss this guidance further in Chapter 6.

¹¹⁸ [The University of Bedfordshire \(SVS0065\)](#) para 20

¹¹⁹ [Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools](#), Education Select Committee report, February 2015

¹²⁰ [PSHE Association \(SVS0021\)](#) para 16

The quality of SRE and PSHE

130. Ofsted's most recent report on PSHE was published in 2013. It looked at both primary and secondary schools and found that 40% of schools require improvement or were inadequate in this area. It also found:

[A] lack of high-quality, age-appropriate sex and relationships education in more than a third of schools [which] was found to be leaving children and young people vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation.¹²¹

131. A survey of over 2,000 young people by the Sex Education Forum published in January 2016 found that:

- 46% had not learnt about 'how to tell when a relationship is healthy'
- 44% had not learnt about 'how to tell when a relationship is abusive'
- 43% had not learnt about 'the responsibility for getting consent as well as the choice to give consent.'¹²²

132. The young people we heard from were also disappointed by the quality and frequency of the SRE lessons they had received:

We had them in younger years, but now we've got to year 10 only a certain group of students has them. We don't have them anymore. When we were in younger years, we didn't talk about relationships—healthy relationships, signs of abuse or anything—but now a lot of people I know are going through things. Now is when they need to have those lessons, but they are not getting taught anything, and healthy relationships are not promoted in school.¹²³

I also think it should be taught more, because I don't think we've actually done any sex education since year 7. We started it in year 6, or the end of year 5 and then in year 6, and maybe a bit in year 7, but we haven't really done any since. I don't think anyone actually knows what sexual harassment is really, because we just learn about relationships and sexual intercourse. We haven't really learned about other things that come with that, such as sexual harassment.¹²⁴

133. We heard that despite longstanding criticism of the current standard of PSHE, not enough was being done to address the issue. The British Humanist Association told us:

The PSHE-specific Ofsted reports from 2007 and 2013, for instance, entitled 'Time for change?' and 'Not yet good enough', stated very clearly that improvements needed to be made in, among other areas, the training of teachers, curriculum time, and the rigour of assessment in the subject. Little to nothing has changed since those reports were published.¹²⁵

121 Ofsted [Personal, social and health education in English schools in 2012](#) May 2013

122 Sex Education Forum [Heads or Tails: What young people are telling us about SRE](#) 2016

123 Q18

124 Q86 Student G

125 British Humanist Association [Evidence Check](#) July 2016

SRE can be an effective tool

134. The Sex Education Forum points to a number of pieces of research which demonstrate positive outcomes for good quality SRE:

- A comprehensive programme of SRE results in young people being less likely to have an ‘age-discrepant’ partner and unwanted sex.
- In a large study carried out in the United States, female respondents who had received ‘comprehensive sexuality education’ were less likely to have a partner with a big age difference (3 years or more younger/older) at first sex and more likely to describe first sex as wanted, compared to those receiving abstinence only or no SRE.
- A systematic healthcare review has concluded that ‘Children who are taught about preventing sexual abuse at school are more likely than others to tell an adult if they had, or were actually experiencing sexual abuse’.¹²⁶

135. According to Public Health Bristol City Council, “Statutory Relationships and Sex Education...has the potential to make the single biggest impact on all forms of sexual violence in this country.” It also points to evidence of the cost effectiveness of PSHE/SRE noting that:

In Bristol alone, domestic violence costs the city over £40 million per year (according to Home Office estimates). Making PSHE/SRE a statutory subject is therefore a relatively inexpensive intervention that will have a long lasting, far reaching impact on sexual health, sexual violence, domestic abuse, unhealthy relationships, body image, sexual harassment, forced marriage, honour violence, FGM, the influence of pornography, consent and so much more.¹²⁷

136. Good quality SRE is shown to have a positive impact in helping to reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence. The evidence clearly shows that current provision of education in this area is patchy and largely inadequate.

When should SRE start?

137. The young people we heard from suggested the problem of sexual harassment was beginning at increasingly younger ages. One 15 year-old girl told us:

I have noticed it a lot in the past two years as well. There’s a lot more as you progress through secondary school. It becomes more of a problem and it happens more. I’ve now realised that the older years are giving an example to the younger years, and they are following it and doing the stuff that we noticed in year 8 and 9, but they’re doing it in year 7 or year 6 a lot more.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Sex Education Forum (SVS0075) paras 1-5

¹²⁷ Public Health Bristol City Council (SVS0044)

¹²⁸ Q15 Student B

138. Attitudes towards relationships and sex are being formed from the earliest ages and should therefore be discussed sooner than secondary school. As Professor Nicky Stanley told us:

Gender attitudes and attitudes to sexual behaviour are quite entrenched by the time young people get to adolescence. There is a good argument for starting earlier.¹²⁹

139. The Children's Society has also found in its work with schools that technology is leading younger children to seeing material which could negatively influence their perceptions of sex and relationships:

Exposure to inappropriate sexual behaviours starts in primary school... Access to the Internet and smart phones gives children and young people access to words, descriptions and images of sexual acts before they have an understanding of what sexual acts are common and what are more extreme.¹³⁰

140. We heard that it is possible to work with parents and teachers to deliver age-appropriate relationships and sex education in primary schools. Big Talk Education explained how fruitful working with primary age children can be:

Where we have worked previously in the primaries we see a significant difference in attitudes and norms as opposed to schools where our first intervention is with Year 9 (14 year olds)...It proves to us that in order to challenge what children and young people are considering normal (if they get their sex education from pornography) then we must start with an age-appropriate...curriculum (which grows with children), which is endorsed by parents and educators.¹³¹

The role of parents is discussed further in Chapter 5.

141. By the time they reach secondary school children often have entrenched views about gender norms. It is therefore important that children are educated about gender equality, consent, relationships and sex in an age-appropriate way starting in primary school.

Should PSHE/SRE be made statutory?

142. As long as PSHE/SRE are not statutory subjects it will be dependent on individual schools or teachers to champion them. But the evidence shows that schools do not always welcome SRE programmes. In an evaluation of a sexual exploitation intervention programme delivered by specialist women's organisations, the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit found that:

Reaching young people in schools is beset with obstacles: some resist projects using a feminist perspective; others fear that accepting work on prevention of sexual exploitation advertises that abuse is happening in the school, and

129 Q126

130 [The Children's Society](#) (SV587) para 2.4

131 [Big Talk Education](#) (SV50048)

thus carries a reputational risk; workers reported that some schools could not identify who would have institutional responsibility for organising access for workers.¹³²

143. The EAW coalition argued that this reluctance on the part of schools means a voluntary system cannot work. It pointed to the existence of “tested, thoughtful, successful interventions...[with] measurable impact on attitudes to abusive behaviour and improving confidence in reporting abuse [as well as] a positive impact on attendance and attainment.”¹³³ However, the voluntary nature of these interventions is a problem as they are dependent on a motivated teacher seeking them out or a school introducing them after an incident of harassment.

Support for statutory PSHE/SRE

144. There is widespread support for making PSHE/SRE compulsory including from: the Education Committee; the Home Affairs Committee; Chairs of the Health, and Business, Innovation and Skills Committees; the Children’s Commissioner for England; the Chief Medical Officer; the Association of Directors of Public Health; the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners; the Association of Independent Local Safeguarding Children Boards Chairs; the NSPCC; two royal societies; six medical royal colleges; over 100 expert bodies; 85% of business leaders; 88% of teachers; 90% of parents; and 92% of young people.¹³⁴

145. Every expert giving oral evidence to this inquiry, with the exception of Ofsted who said it was a matter for Government, supported making PSHE/SRE compulsory. Many experts argued that high quality SRE, delivered by well-trained individuals, and adopted within a whole school framework, could make a substantial difference to reducing sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

146. The importance of statutory PSHE/SRE has been noted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In its report to the UK Government in June 2016, it recommended that the Government:

Ensure that meaningful sexual and reproductive health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum for all schools, including academies, special schools and youth detention centres.¹³⁵

147. Of the 92 written evidence submissions we received, only one said that SRE should not be made a statutory subject. The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children Safe at School campaign said “that the best place for young children to learn about sexual matters is from their parents, within the family setting.” It also argued that “There is no evidence that early sex education reduces sexting or sexual abuse.”¹³⁶

132 [Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit \(SVS0039\)](#) para 26

133 [End Violence Against Women Coalition \(SVS0058\)](#) para 3.3

134 [British Humanist Association Evidence Check](#) July 2016

135 [Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) para 64b

136 [SPUC Safe at School \(SVS0040\)](#)

148. However, as shown above, there is strong academic and expert support for compulsory high-quality SRE as part of the approach to reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence. Furthermore, the message from teachers, students, parents and those working with young people is clear—statutory PSHE/SRE is wanted and needed.

The ministerial response

149. Both the Minister for Children and Families, and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, emphasised the importance of PSHE and SRE.

I am in no doubt, and I am sure my ministerial colleagues would agree with me, without necessarily speaking for their Departments, that this has to be a core part of what schools do. That is why in the national curriculum it is clear that that is what the expectation of schools is: to have quality PSHE at the heart of the school offer.¹³⁷ (Minister for Children and Families)

From the point of view of the Government Equalities Office, there are some very compelling arguments [for statutory PSHE/SRE]. We have heard the arguments and your Committee's review on this will, I am sure, only strengthen and add to this.¹³⁸ (Minister for Women and Equalities)

The Minister for Children and Families told us:

We are genuinely actively reviewing PSHE and SRE. I hope we can make some significant progress in the next few weeks and months and be able to say something rather more profound than I am able to say today.¹³⁹

150. Excellent resources to teach children and young people about gender equality, relationships, sex and consent, in age-appropriate ways, already exist. But at the moment only a minority of schools are delivering good teaching in this area. The Government must take a lead in ensuring that all children have access to high quality sex and relationships education (SRE) and it does not remain the privilege of a few. Making SRE a statutory subject is the first step towards achieving this. The vast majority of parents, pupils and teachers support statutory PSHE/SRE, as do health professionals, the police and other experts working in the field.

151. We welcome the Government's response that the status of PSHE and SRE is currently under review. We recommend that PSHE and SRE are made statutory subjects as part of the new Education Bill.

Delivering high quality SRE

152. Whilst making SRE a statutory subject will ensure it is given time and status within the school curriculum, this will not reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence on its own. Appropriate SRE must be delivered by confident, well-qualified individuals. It must also be accompanied by support services for students who disclose incidents of harassment or abuse.

137 Q264 Edward Timpson

138 Q265 Caroline Dineage

139 Q263

Teacher training

153. Research by the Sex Education Forum found that “only 3% of teachers teaching SRE said that initial teacher training had prepared them adequately to teach the subject.”¹⁴⁰

154. Teachers’ lack of confidence around tackling issues related to sexual harassment and sexual violence was mentioned by many experts working within schools, including Sophie Bennett from UK Feminista. She observed that:

One of the things we hear time and time again from teachers is that they do not feel equipped to have conversations about sexual harassment and sexism, let alone to teach any sort of lesson on it.¹⁴¹

155. Teaching unions, the NUT, ATL and NASUWT, all support more and better training for teachers to deliver SRE and more broadly address the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence. The NASUWT said:

Effective training for teachers on dealing with the sensitive issues of girls’ sexualised behaviour and acts of sexual harassment is urgently required within all initial teacher training routes and continuing professional development.¹⁴²

156. We also heard that more general training on gender stereotypes in school is needed. This is relevant because, as evidence submitted by Rebecca Asher shows, a stronger belief in gender stereotypes is correlated with being both a victim, and perpetrator of, sexual violence.¹⁴³ David Brockway from the Great Men Project told us:

The way in which we approach teacher training should include a huge element on gender and sexism. This country has been very successful with tackling racism and homophobia in schools, but a lot of teachers feel that sexism has fallen by the wayside as a result—that we have not kept up with that.¹⁴⁴

157. The Department for Education (DfE) said “Initial teacher training (ITT) courses contain content to prepare teachers to meet the Teachers’ Standards, which the DfE updated in September 2012.”¹⁴⁵ This includes “responding to safeguarding incidents” and “maintaining high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school that are relevant to tackling harassment and violence.” However, ITT courses do not have to cover teaching PSHE or SRE and do not have to deal specifically with how to tackle sexual harassment, sexual violence or gender stereotypes.

158. Some ITT providers do offer training in these areas. UK Feminista currently delivers workshops on tackling sexism to providers including Teach First, UCL Institute of Education, and the University of Durham. To date they have worked with over 1000 trainee teachers.¹⁴⁶

140 [Sex Education Forum](#) (SV50075) para 13

141 Q106

142 [NASUWT](#) (SV50072) para 6

143 [Rebecca Asher](#) (SV50096) para 26

144 Q224

145 [Department for Education](#) (SV50088) para 10

146 [UK Feminista](#) (SV50029) para 3

159. We have heard a number of suggestions for improving training for teachers to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. These include:

- Creating a national training programme for all school staff, including governors. This could be modelled on a successful anti-disablist bullying training programme funded by the Department for Education. (Anti-Bullying Alliance)
- Making sexual violence training a core part of all existing school staff members continued professional development, with compulsory annual training provided in the same way as safeguarding training. (Rape Crisis South London)
- Investing more in teacher training for SRE and PSHE. (Sex Education Forum)
- Making tackling sexism a core and compulsory element of all ITT courses, including PGCE, Schools Direct and Teach First courses. (UK Feminista).

160. There is a clear need and desire for better training to support teachers, other school staff and Governors to address the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence, both in SRE and through a whole school approach.

161. As part of its ongoing review of Initial Teacher Training, we recommend that the Government assess the most effective ways to ensure all school staff are well trained to deal with and prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence. The Government should report back to us with their findings and plan of action by March 2017.

Engaging boys and young men

162. To date, the focus in SRE has been often based on girls changing their behaviour, rather than addressing the culture that leads some boys and young men to sexually harass and abuse girls and young women. Professor Jessica Ringrose noted that:

The outdated SRE curriculum is focused on disease and pregnancy and delaying intercourse is a ‘parts and plumbing’ approach, where girls must manage boys’ sexual urges.¹⁴⁷

In particular, she pointed to research that films used in schools about sexting are “aimed at girls” and “based on fear, risk and shame”, and that this is “harmful”. Focus groups find that these interventions lead to young people blaming girls for taking photos, even though boys may be sharing them without consent.

163. There is evidence that young women would like to see a greater emphasis on young men’s role in sexual harassment. Dr Vanita Sundaram highlighted the view of one young woman:

It is the guys essentially raping the girls, so they should be taught not to do it. Because, if you’re just telling the girls how to protect themselves, you should like kill it from where it starts.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ UCL, Institute of Education (SVS0041)

¹⁴⁸ Evidence from Dr Vanita Sundaram para 4

164. David Brockway, who delivers workshops to boys and young men through the Great Men project, told us that boys wanted the opportunity to engage with SRE and PSHE but were not always given the chance to do so.

One school I went to last year...said that for the last six years they have been working with their girls on combatting sexual harassment and on body positivity. I said, "What have you been doing with the boys?" and they said, "Nothing; they just watch a video."¹⁴⁹

165. There is international evidence, cited by Professor Nicky Stanley, that prevention programmes in schools are increasingly looking at boys' behaviour. However, there are challenges around their implementation:

There was...a strong view from the experts that such initiatives need to avoid blaming or accusing boys, because that is only going to provoke resistance.¹⁵⁰

166. We heard directly from one school student how this can be a problem:

When it comes to this topic, men are seen as the main enemies. You can see from the statistics that men do it more often, but it can happen on both sides. When people come into schools or we have educational lessons, men are portrayed as the issue on all occasions. That puts across the view that all men will become violent towards woman and abusive and dominant, and that can encourage more [of that behaviour].¹⁵¹

167. It must be remembered that the majority of boys and young men do not engage in sexual harassment and sexual violence. As Professor Nicky Stanley noted:

We are talking about a minority. The fact that lots of boys do have positive, respectful attitudes is something that can be worked with. Positive attitudes in the peer group are a terrific tool with which you can work to change attitudes among those boys whose attitudes are more negative, because the power of the peer group is very great.¹⁵²

168. We welcome the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities comments on the importance of engaging with boys and young men in this area. As she said:

There is the opportunity for boys to be the champions to the solution... That is something that I would love to see filtering down to more and more into schools from a very early age, so that boys do not see themselves as stuck in some narrow gap that they have to fit in, between being some sort of sexual predator and something else. There is enormous power in their hands to be the solution to this rather than the problem.¹⁵³

149 Q210
150 Q211
151 Q93 Student K
152 Q229
153 Q274

169. Too often, SRE ignores the position of boys and young men. It must be broadened to challenge harmful notions of masculinity and reflect boys' experiences. It should also support boys to challenge and reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence.

170. *We welcome the Government's interest in supporting boys and young men to be part of the solution to the problem of sexual harassment and sexual violence. We recommend that the Government fund research to establish the most effective ways to achieve this.*

5 Parents have a central role

The role of parents

171. The important part parents play in tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence was reiterated throughout the course of this inquiry. As the Minister for Children and Families pointed out:

Part of this...is about how we then involve parents, because a child spends a third of their time at school. A lot of their time is away from the protective and safe environment of the school.¹⁵⁴

172. Many parents find it difficult to discuss these issues with their children. As Rebecca Asher explained:

Parents are flailing here. They have never found it comfortable talking to their children about sex, and most parents do not. Now they are in a world where it is often so very different from the world that they were growing up in, they are flailing. If they can be brought into the conversation and work in partnership with the schools on this, at least you are able to have a two-pronged approach. You might not be able to solve the world, but...you can work in partnership.¹⁵⁵

173. Parents and schools working together can make SRE more effective, as demonstrated in evidence from the Sex Education Forum.¹⁵⁶ As OnePlusOne noted “policy guidelines from the Department for Education and Skills have also stipulated parental and/or community involvement with the school SRE curriculum.”¹⁵⁷

174. Parental involvement in SRE can also alleviate fears some teachers may have about teaching SRE. Research with ATL members found 62% said they would have concerns delivering lessons around sexually explicit content and, of those, 79% said this was because of parents’ concerns.¹⁵⁸

175. Parents’ current level of understanding of PSHE and SRE may be limited. As one parent told us:

Despite being a teacher and a caring, well-educated parent, I wasn’t clear until recently on the statutory requirements in primary and secondary schools in relation to SRE and PSHE and I hugely undervalued the importance of both these areas of the curriculum.

I believe many parents, and even teachers, are unclear or mistaken in the understanding of what a school will cover on sex and relationship education. Parents need to be told so they can work with a school or fill in gaps.¹⁵⁹

154 Q251 Edward Timpson

155 Q227

156 [Sex Education Forum](#) (SVS0075) para 14

157 [OnePlusOne](#) (SVS0056)

158 [Association of Teachers and Lecturers](#) (SVS0071) para 48

159 Anonymous written evidence (SVS0090)

176. Evidence of how parents can be better involved with SRE and other aspects of PSHE was offered by several organisations working within schools, including Tough Cookies Education Ltd and Big Talk Education. Lynnette Smith from Big Talk Education described her experience working with parents:

The best way to get parents involved is to start early. A few senior schools have tried to have parents evenings when we are bringing in an SRE programme and it is a total waste of time. By that time, teenagers do not want their parents going into school—heaven forbid. Especially in primary school, it is really easy to engage parents. They are more than willing to come along. They still see their children as vulnerable.¹⁶⁰

177. The possibility of even earlier engagement with parents was recommended by Rebecca Asher:

Guidance on the pitfalls of gender stereotyping [should] be included in information given to parents and parents-to-be by maternity and family services. ...It need not be censorious or dogmatic but simply provide parents with food for thought and references to further information.¹⁶¹

178. Professor Sonia Livingstone, Evidence Champion for the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, also recommended better support for parents as a key element in reducing sexual harassment and sexual violence:

Schools and governments should offer more support and materials to parents to enable them to provide advice and guidance to children and young people on issues related to sex, relationships and sexualisation in commerce, the media and online. Parents especially need resources for talking to younger children in an age-appropriate manner. All these resources must be carefully tailored to children's diverse needs, including those who are at risk or from a sexual, ethnic or other minority, avoiding inappropriate assumptions about 'typical' or 'normal' development.¹⁶²

179. Whilst parents are an important part of the solution in improving children and young people's education in this area, it is essential to remember that some parents will be perpetrators of sexual abuse and violence, as noted by Dr Fiona Vera Gray:

Some parents are going to be sexually abusing their children. Sometimes that is going to happen in the family unit outside of school, so we need to start talking to the kids as soon as we can, when they are very young, to give them the spaces to start talking about what they may be experiencing outside of school.¹⁶³

180. Parents have an important role to play in reducing levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Taking a whole school approach to this problem will mean parents are fully engaged and supported to address the issue with their children.

160 Q133

161 [Rebecca Asher](#) (SVS0096) para 32i

162 [Professor Sonia Livingstone](#) (SVS0064)

163 Q110

Specialist support and interventions

181. Evidence to this inquiry was clear and consistent about the necessity of schools funding and working with specialist services and projects to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence. This should be part of the whole-school approach.

182. The Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) said:

Specialist input is necessary to address sexual consent and coercion. This should be delivered by experts, preferably specialist women's organisations who have developed much of the prevention work in this field.¹⁶⁴

183. The value of external input was observed in a CWASU evaluation of a local project run by Nia, a charity which runs projects to reduce violence against women and children:

One senior teacher summed up why it mattered that the programme was delivered by an external, specialist organisation. 'It helps [young women] to engage, they're not actually members of staff in the school community and certain aspects of support can't be done here.'¹⁶⁵

184. Similar observations were reported by other external service providers, including David Brockway.

Boys find it easier to open up to people who are not teachers who they have to meet every day. It is quite hard for a boy to admit something that is perhaps shaming or quite vulnerable to someone they see often.¹⁶⁶

185. As noted in Chapter 4, teachers are often uncomfortable and untrained in how to deliver sessions on healthy relationships. This can result in issues such as sexual consent being omitted entirely, or reinforcing victim-blaming messages that girls are responsible for keeping themselves safe from sexual abuse and exploitation.

186. The support of specialists is an essential corollary of improved, statutory SRE. Experts stressed the importance of schools being aware that whenever prevention work is carried out it will prompt disclosures by children so there needs to be clear referral pathways to specialist support services.

As Professor Stanley told us:

One of the reasons why schools struggle to address these issues is because of the lack of support services available for young people who do disclose harassment or abuse. Schools are anxious that, if they start to deliver teaching on these issues, students will start to disclose and they will be left holding a can of worms that they really do not know how to manage. I do not think that prevention efforts in schools are sufficient.¹⁶⁷

164 [Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit \(SVS0039\)](#)

165 *Ibid*

166 [The Great Initiative \(SVS0091\)](#)

167 Q214

187. Schools' responses to disclosures are currently highly variable according to Rape Crisis England and Wales:

The first response to a victim/survivor of disclosure is critical to how she seeks support in future and yet children in some schools receive less support, less information and less protection than in neighbouring schools.¹⁶⁸

188. The risk of not accompanying an awareness raising programme with adequate resources to respond to disclosures was described by Jo Sharpen from AVA with regard to the Home Office's "Disrespect Nobody" Campaign:

Unfortunately, although the new campaign has been working quite well with young people, it does not have any support attached to it. The budget was not there this year for that. That worries me, because young people are seeing the new adverts, they are suddenly recognising that they might be in an abusive relationship and they are not sure where to go for support because there is not that support element to this campaign. It has to always come hand-in-hand, or you are just increasing risk for young people.¹⁶⁹

189. The Government has committed funding to support specialist organisations to tackle other forms of bullying in schools. In March 2016 the Government Equalities Office (GEO) announced that it would make £1m available to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying. As the Government explained:

This new HBT programme will build on the previous £2m grant programme which was announced in October 2014 aimed at preventing and tackling HBT bullying in schools. Eight organisations...were awarded funds from the programme in order to run projects in schools to increase awareness and training through school policies, and help foster positive discussions and attitudes about the harm that bullying and prejudice can cause.¹⁷⁰

A similar approach could be taken to address sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

190. Specialist sector organisations play an important role in delivering high quality SRE, as well as supporting schools and pupils when disclosures about sexual harassment and sexual violence are made. It is essential that these organisations are able to access adequate resources so they can continue to support schools and young people.

191. *The Government should create a fund to support specialist sector organisations to use their expertise to help schools tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence.*

168 [Rape Crisis England and Wales](#) (SVS0059) para 4.1

169 Q140. There was no funding for an online forum for the Disrespect Nobody campaign in 2015–16. However, the Home Office pointed out that campaign materials directed young people to the new campaign website where young people could get more information and advice on the issues covered in the adverts.

170 [Department for Education](#) (SVS0088) para 20

6 Tackling the impact of pornography

Access to pornography

192. There is extensive evidence that children's perceptions of sex, consent, gender roles and relationships are changing as a result of the pornography they are seeing. Research with over 1,000 16–21 year-olds in 2014 found that:

- Almost a quarter of young people were 12 years-old or younger when they first saw porn online (24.6%) and 7.3% were under 10
- The majority of young people (60%) were 14 years-old or younger when they first saw porn online—although 62% said they first saw it when they weren't expecting to, or because they were shown it by someone else. Only 22% of those surveyed say they were looking for it on purpose.
- More than half the respondents thought that online pornography affects what young men and women expect from sex—and a majority (74%) thought it particularly affected men's expectations.
- The most common answer was that young men expect young women to behave like the women in porn films.¹⁷¹

193. The Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit referred to its research with 110 young people as evidence of the ubiquity of pornography in their lives. It explained how:

One 16 year old young man said to us: 'most of the people I know, they use it. 99% of boys'. While young people described pornography as a form of entertainment, they explicitly talked about its function as 'seeing how to have sex'.¹⁷²

194. Big Talk Education has also noticed in their work in schools that pornography is informing children's views about sex:

When pupils are given the chance to ask questions anonymously, it becomes clear pornography is a main source of information about sex and sexual behaviour. "Questions like "Is it ok for me to cum over my girlfriend's face?" are not unusual as is the apparent normalisation of anal sex. Another concerning increase is referrals to us for children and young teenagers with pornography addictions. This is a new and increasing area of work for us. They include girls as well as boys with one girl aged only eight.¹⁷³

195. The ATL found more than 40% of teachers it surveyed said they had seen an increase in pupils sharing sexually explicit material, One secondary school teacher reported that:

Pornography is easily available on mobiles and I have caught pupils watching it during break times.¹⁷⁴

171 [BBC Porn: what's the harm? survey](#) April 2014

172 [Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit \(SV50039\)](#) para 15

173 [Big Talk Education \(SV50048\)](#)

174 [Association of Teachers and Lecturers \(SV50071\)](#) para 37

196. The nature of the pornography being consumed by young people is too often misunderstood, as Marai Larasi of Imkaan explained:

Very often, if people are not engaged with this work, they think of pornography and they think about Playboy or an online version of Playboy. Actually what has happened over the last few years is pornography that would have been considered hard-core pornography, which would have operated on the peripheries, is now the mainstream pornography.¹⁷⁵

The impact of pornography on children

197. Chief Constable Simon Bailey explained the NPCC's concerns about the impact of pornography on sexual harassment and sexual violence. He cited previous research commissioned by the Children's Commissioner for England which found a correlation between children viewing pornography and subsequent engagement in risky behaviours. He also noted:

Anecdotally we regularly hear concerns from police officers/staff relating to pornography and how this is influencing expectations relating to sex, relationships and consent by children and young people.¹⁷⁶

198. The relationship between pornography and behaviour is examined in research by Dr Christine Barter. It found that:

Holding negative gender attitudes and regularly watching online pornography were significantly associated with higher rates of self-reported sexual violence perpetration.¹⁷⁷

It should be noted that this research finds a correlation between watching pornography online and rates of reported perpetration. It did not set out to examine causation which is notoriously difficult to ascertain.

199. Data on the impact of pornography is backed up by a plethora of qualitative evidence. For example, Laura Bates from the Everyday Sexism Project described an incident at one school she visited:

I was in a school where a teacher told me they had recently had a rape case involving a 14-year old male perpetrator. One of the teachers had asked him 'why didn't you stop when she was crying?' and he had replied: 'because it's normal for girls to cry during sex'.¹⁷⁸

200. A secondary school teacher from Birmingham with 15 years' experience told us about the impact of pornography on pupils at her school:

I have heard boys talk about certain porn stars and talk of their expectations for both girls and boys to have body shapes and proportions similar to what they view both from pornography and within the mass media...I see the

175 Q116

176 [Simon Bailey National Police Chiefs' Council \(SVS0092\)](#) para 31

177 [Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm \(SVS0024\)](#)

178 [Everyday Sexism Project \(SVS0077\)](#)

transformation of fresh faced innocent year 7 girls who will try to be heavily sexualised by the time they reach year 10. I see these beautiful girls not understanding the option to say no.¹⁷⁹

201. It is important to recognise that pornography can have specific impacts on particular groups of children and young people. As Marai Larasi told us:

The other thing about pornography is that it is incredibly racist. It constructs groups of young men as thugs and monsters, and constructs all women as sluts, as filth, basically. It also constructs particular groups of women as exotic, as asking for it, as beasts, as animals, et cetera. What does that mean to a young black woman in Hackney who is seeing herself represented in that way? What does it do to the young black man who sees himself represented as a thug?¹⁸⁰

202. A focus group run by the Anti-Bullying Alliance with young people with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEND) found they felt strongly that increased consumption of pornography was a driver for sexual bullying. These young people thought pornography:

- affected how young people thought about sex and what sex should be like
- affected how young people thought they should behave
- made people feel pressured to act more sexually.¹⁸¹

203. The negative impact of pornography on children and young people was acknowledged by Government ministers. The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, Karen Bradley MP told us:

It is very clear that the use of pornography by young people distorts their impression and image of what a normal, healthy sexual relationship should be.¹⁸²

204. Widespread access to pornography appears to be having a negative impact on children and young people's perceptions of sex, relationships and consent. There is evidence of a correlation between children's regular viewing of pornography and harmful behaviours. The type of pornography many children are exposed to is often more extreme than adults realise.

How should pornography be dealt with?

205. Recommendations to address the impact of pornography predominantly focus on educating children and young people about sex, relationships and pornography. As Laura Bates said:

179 Birmingham school teacher (SV50030)

180 Q116

181 [Anti-Bullying Alliance National Children's Bureau](#) (SV50018) para 4.3

182 Q271

It is completely unrealistic to expect that we can prevent young people seeing online porn. But what we can do is help them to make sense of it and to differentiate between what they see online and what a healthy relationship might look like with clear, comprehensive, age-appropriate conversations.¹⁸³

206. Other strategies, including improving restrictions on access to pornography, are also needed, as Dr Vera-Gray told us:

We do absolutely everything that we can around age verification, education more broadly, some public awareness campaigns—that is all great. We need to do everything we can, because [pornography] is coming at them from everywhere.¹⁸⁴

Better education

207. There is widespread consensus that better education about sex and relationships is needed to mitigate the influence of pornography on children and young people. As the school students we heard from said:

The internet is sort of like a free plane; you can't really control it that much, so the best way to tackle that issue is to educate. That's it.¹⁸⁵

I think that [pornography] should be blocked, but I also think that it should still be taught, because even if it is blocked, there are still going to be certain ways to get access to it. I think it still needs to be taught, because it is seen as embarrassing at school to talk about, but if you are not taught about it, you are not prepared for the future and other situations.¹⁸⁶

208. Researchers from the Connect Centre, University of Lancashire also conclude that education is the approach most likely to work in combatting the impact of pornography:

Attempts to regulate and restrict young people's exposure to online pornography are likely to be ineffectual due to ease of access and normalisation. Thus, SRE should be attempting to foster critical approaches which acknowledge its lack of congruence with lived experiences and challenge the misogynist attitudes displayed within pornographic scripts.¹⁸⁷

209. As discussed in Chapter 4, most schools are not currently offering good quality SRE. Evidence we received suggests that SRE is particularly poor when it comes to addressing pornography. A survey of ATL members found that only 22% of staff said their school or college currently discussed pornography in SRE or PSHE classes. Nonetheless, there is support amongst teachers to address the issue:

Provided it is taught at an age-appropriate level at school, over three-quarters (76%) of respondents...said pupils should be taught about the dangers of pornography, as part of SRE or PSHE.¹⁸⁸

183 Ibid

184 Q117

185 Q32 Student F

186 Q32 Student B

187 [Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm \(SVS0024\)](#)

188 [Association of Teachers and Lecturers \(SVS0071\)](#) para 32

210. Poor quality SRE can make children more likely to seek out pornography, as Jo Sharpen from AVA explained:

Young people, because they are not getting the quality of SRE that they need in schools, are looking to things like pornography to get that advice and education.¹⁸⁹

She cited her own work moderating the forum for the Home Office's campaigns on teenage peer-on-peer abuse as evidence of this phenomenon:

I spoke to about 3,000 young people in six weeks and nearly all of them were completely confused about consent, what it meant; they were referencing pornography as their benchmark, had no understanding of what consent actually means, of what their rights are, even what sex is.¹⁹⁰

211. The importance of ensuring schools address the issue of pornography was recognised by the Minister for Children and Families:

There is a clear role for schools to play particularly in the early stages... We know that those first few years of secondary school is when children are particularly vulnerable to the darker side of the internet and the interaction that they have with other pupils and people who they do not know can lead them down the wrong path. Yes, schools have a very clear role to play in making sure we tackle that.¹⁹¹

212. As we noted in Chapter 4: **current Government guidance on teaching SRE was last updated 16 years ago and has no reference to pornography. There is a clear need for better guidance to schools on how to approach this sensitive topic in an age-appropriate manner.**

213. *The Government should immediately update its guidance on SRE to include teaching about pornography. The new guidance should offer advice to schools about how to approach this topic in an age-appropriate way. It should also include suggestions of how schools can work in partnership with parents to address the impact of pornography on children's perceptions of sex, relationships and consent.*

Age restrictions

214. In the Queen's Speech in May 2016 it was announced that the Digital Economy Bill would include measures to require pornographic sites to verify users are over 18. Chief Constable Simon Bailey was amongst those who welcomed this development. He warned that this was only part of the solution, however, and that:

Schools have a vital role to play in combatting the potential effects of pornography and sexualised culture through the delivery of high quality relationship and sex education as part of a coordinated PSHE agenda.¹⁹²

189 Jo Sharpen Q117

190 Ibid

191 Q272

192 [Simon Bailey National Police Chiefs' Council \(SVS0092\)](#) para 33

215. Beyond current plans for age verification, other restrictions on access to pornography include these recommendations from the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC):

- filters for online content
- age ratings for online music videos.

The BBFC have already trialled a system of voluntary age ratings for music videos and in August 2015 the Government announced that “the UK music industry, Vevo and YouTube would make this scheme permanent for videos produced by artists signed to major UK labels and that independent labels would also pilot this voluntary initiative.”¹⁹³

216. Whilst it is clear that children and young people may well be able to circumvent age restrictions on pornography and other websites, there is still an argument for bringing about these changes. As Dr Vera-Gray explained:

It is about sending a very strong message. The law has impact in terms of what it does substantively but also symbolically. Changing the law around what is classified as extreme pornography, what is legal and not legal sends a very strong message that this is not how we want our society to see women; this is not how we expect our men and boys to behave; these are not the representations of race that we support as a culture.¹⁹⁴

217. We welcome the Government’s forthcoming legislation for age verification of pornographic websites. However, age verification legislation will only contribute to reducing sexual harassment and sexual violence in conjunction with the other recommendations made throughout this report.

¹⁹³ [British Board of Film Classification \(SVS0057\)](#)

¹⁹⁴ Q119

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is a significant issue which affects a large number of children and young people, particularly girls, across the country. Evidence shows that the majority of perpetrators of this abuse are boys, and the majority of victims are girls. However it is essential that the negative impact on both boys and girls is recognised and addressed. (Paragraph 45)
2. There is insufficient data to conclusively demonstrate that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is a growing problem. It is true that such behaviour has occurred in schools for many years, as in wider society. However, significant qualitative evidence suggests that increasing access to pornography and technological advances, including online platforms, can facilitate harassment and violence and thus exacerbate the problem. (Paragraph 46)
3. Teachers, parents, young people and third sector organisations are telling us that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is having an impact on young people and school life. Consequences include: physical and emotional harm, including teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; girls feeling unable to fully participate in educational and extra-curricular opportunities; teachers spending valuable time dealing with incidents of sexual harassment and bullying; and young people developing a sense that sexual harassment and sexual violence are acceptable behaviours and learning social norms that are carried through to adult life. (Paragraph 47)
4. *The Government and schools must make tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence an immediate policy priority.* (Paragraph 48)
5. Schools lack the guidance, training and structures to deal with incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Too often such incidents are brushed aside by staff and not taken sufficiently seriously by school leaders. (Paragraph 55)
6. We welcome the new sexting guidance for schools. However, guidance on specific areas of harassment is not sufficient to deal with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. (Paragraph 60)
7. We welcome the fact that the Government has committed to further amending Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance. We are also encouraged that the Government has said the Committee may be able to feed into this. However, it is disappointing that it has taken this inquiry for the Government to address sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools within this key piece of statutory guidance. (Paragraph 72)
8. *We recommend that Keeping Children Safe in Education should directly reference sexual harassment and sexual violence. It should refer schools to a whole school approach as the most effective means of tackling this problem. Specialists working in the field of sexual harassment and violence against women and girls should be consulted on the best ways to draft these revisions to KCSIE.* (Paragraph 73)

9. There is no reason why sexual harassment should not be included alongside racist, homophobic and disability-based bullying in Ofsted or Government guidance. We welcome the Minister's commitment to raising this issue with Ofsted and look forward to both Ofsted and the Government's guidance being amended urgently. (Paragraph 79)
10. *Ofsted and Government guidance on bullying should be amended immediately to include direct reference to sexual harassment and resources for how to deal with it.* (Paragraph 80)
11. There is overwhelming evidence that schools want, and need, clear national guidance on how to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence. We agree that different schools may wish to tackle the problem of sexual harassment and sexual violence in different ways. It is also important that, whilst all schools must meet national standards, they should be encouraged to surpass these expectations whenever possible. (Paragraph 85)
12. Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools will only be reduced through a whole school approach. This must involve all staff, students, governors and parents, in addition to local child safeguarding bodies, police and specialist third sector organisations. Schools need guidance on how to implement this approach effectively. The Welsh Government offers a useful model for how this can be achieved. (Paragraph 91)
13. *The Department for Education should develop, publish and publicise national guidance on adopting a whole school approach to reducing and preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence in all primary and secondary schools. This guidance should be published so schools can implement it in September 2017.* (Paragraph 92)
14. It is clear that, in addition to amending current guidance, new legislation is needed to ensure tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence becomes a priority for all schools. (Paragraph 93)
15. *The Government should create a statutory obligation in the forthcoming Education Bill for all schools, primary and secondary, to develop a whole school approach to preventing and tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence. We also recommend that the Department for Education remind all school Governors of their legal obligations to address sexual harassment and sexual violence in school. Guidance and support on how to achieve this most effectively should be provided to Governing Bodies.* (Paragraph 94)
16. *We recommend that police data record the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools specifically. This would allow for better analysis of the prevalence and increase/decrease of this problem.* (Paragraph 107)
17. Understanding the scale, location and relative incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is key to addressing it. However, current data collection has been shown to be inadequate. Schools need better guidance on what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence; and how incidents should be recorded and reported. There is scope for improved cooperation between schools and other agencies, like the police, working in this area. (Paragraph 110)

18. *As part of the whole school approach guidance we have recommended, the Government should ensure all schools receive clear definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence. Schools also need information on how to record, monitor and respond to incidents, including when to report them to the police. All schools should collect this data. It should be collated nationally and published annually.* (Paragraph 111)
19. We agree with the majority of experts we heard from that Ofsted should be monitoring State-funded schools' actions in preventing and tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence and supporting survivors. It is already tasked with inspecting how adequately schools are safeguarding pupils and has a well-established school inspection regime in place. (Paragraph 118)
20. *In order for Ofsted to successfully monitor schools' progress in this area, it must update its training and guidance by September 2017 so all schools are inspected on how effectively they are preventing and dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence.* (Paragraph 119)
21. We welcome the new standards the Government has implemented for safeguarding children's welfare in independent schools. However, these changes do not directly address the continuum of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. (Paragraph 123)
22. *The obligation on schools to prevent and address sexual harassment and sexual violence that we called for in paragraph 94 must include independent schools.* (Paragraph 124)
23. Good quality SRE is shown to have a positive impact, helping to reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence. The evidence clearly shows that current provision of education in this area is patchy and largely inadequate. (Paragraph 136)
24. By the time they reach secondary school children often have entrenched views about gender norms. It is therefore important that children are educated about gender equality, consent, relationships and sex in an age appropriate way starting in primary school. (Paragraph 141)
25. Excellent resources to teach children and young people about gender equality, relationships, sex and consent, in age appropriate ways, already exist. But at the moment only a minority of schools are delivering good teaching in this area. The Government must take a lead in ensuring that all children have access to high quality SRE and it does not remain the privilege of a few. Making SRE a statutory subject is the first step towards achieving this. The vast majority of parents, pupils and teachers support statutory PSHE/SRE, as do health professionals, the police and other experts working in the field. (Paragraph 150)
26. We welcome the Government's response that the status of PSHE and SRE is currently under review. (Paragraph 151)
27. *We recommend that PSHE and SRE are made statutory subjects as part of the new Education Bill.* (Paragraph 151)

28. There is a clear need and desire for better training to support teachers, other school staff and Governors to address the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence, both in SRE and through a whole school approach. (Paragraph 160)
29. *As part of its ongoing review of Initial Teacher Training, we recommend that the Government assess the most effective ways to ensure all school staff are well trained to deal with and prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence. The Government should report back to us with their findings and plan of action by March 2017.* (Paragraph 161)
30. Too often, SRE ignores the position of boys and young men. It must be broadened to challenge harmful notions of masculinity and reflect boys' experiences. It should also support boys to challenge and reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence. (Paragraph 169)
31. *We welcome the Government's interest in supporting boys and young men to be part of the solution to the problem of sexual harassment and sexual violence. We recommend that the Government fund research to establish the most effective ways to achieve this.* (Paragraph 170)
32. Parents have an important role to play in reducing levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Taking a whole school approach to this problem will mean parents are fully engaged and supported to address the issue with their children. (Paragraph 180)
33. Specialist sector organisations play an important role in delivering high quality SRE, as well as supporting schools and pupils when disclosures about sexual harassment and sexual violence are made. It is essential that these organisations are able access adequate resources so they can continue to support schools and young people. (Paragraph 190)
34. *The Government should create a fund to support specialist sector organisations to use their expertise to help schools tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence.* (Paragraph 191)
35. Widespread access to pornography appears to be having a negative impact on children and young people's perceptions of sex, relationships and consent. There is evidence of a correlation between children's regular viewing of pornography and harmful behaviours. The type of pornography many children are exposed to is often more extreme than adults realise. (Paragraph 204)
36. Current Government guidance on teaching SRE was last updated 16 years ago and has no reference to pornography. There is a clear need for better guidance to schools on how to approach this sensitive topic in an age appropriate manner. (Paragraph 212)
37. *The Government should immediately update its guidance on SRE to include teaching about pornography. The new guidance should offer advice to schools about how to approach this topic in an age appropriate way. It should also include suggestions of how schools can work in partnership with parents to address the impact of pornography on children's perceptions of sex, relationships and consent.* (Paragraph 213)

38. We welcome the Government's forthcoming legislation for age verification of pornographic websites. However, age verification legislation will only contribute to reducing sexual harassment and sexual violence in conjunction with the other recommendations made throughout this report. (Paragraph 217)

Annex: Terms of Reference

Establishing the scale of the problem

- How much sexual harassment currently occurs in primary and secondary schools?
- Who are the targets of harassment and who are the perpetrators?
- How often are teachers the victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?
- Are levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence increasing in schools?
- How well is the problem being recorded and monitored?

Understanding the impact of sexual harassment in schools

- What impact does sexual harassment and sexual violence in school have on girls and young women; boys and young men; and teachers?

What can be done to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?

- What measures are currently in place to address this issue? How adequate are they?
- What evidence is there of schemes proven to reduce levels of sexual harassment in schools in the UK or elsewhere?
- Can schools tackle this problem individually or is national action needed to reduce levels of harassment?
- What role can OFSTED play in monitoring and enforcing action on reducing sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?
- What role can other stakeholders, including teacher training providers, teaching unions, governors and parents, play in tackling this problem?
- What action would be most effective in reducing levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?

What can schools do to support students to deal better with the online elements of this problem?

Evidence from our pre-consultation work shows sexting, online bullying and the normalisation of pornography are all issues for students and they want more support in dealing with them.

- How adequate are schools' current responses to sexting and online sexual harassment?

- What can schools do better to support their students to deal with sexual harassment and sexual violence online?
- What impact is pornography having on levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?
- What can be done by schools and other stakeholders to tackle the impact of pornography?

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 7 September 2016

Members present:

Mrs Maria Miller, in the Chair

Ruth Cadbury Ben Howlett
Maria Caulfield Jess Phillips
Angela Crawley Mr Gavin Shuker
Gill Furniss

Draft Report (*Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 217 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 14 September at 9am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 25 May 2016

Question number

Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, Student E and Student F [Q1–35](#)
Student G, Student H, Student K and Student J [Q36–100](#)

Tuesday 7 June 2016

Sophie Bennett, Co-Director, UK Feminista, **Marai Larasi MBE**, Executive Director, Imkaan, **Susie McDonald**, Chief Executive Officer, Tender Education & Arts, **Jo Sharpen**, Policy Manager, Against Violence and Abuse (AVA), **Lynette Smith**, Managing Director and Founder, Big Talk Education, and **Dr Fiona Vera-Gray**, Research Fellow, Department of Law, Durham University

[Q101–142](#)

Tuesday 14 June 2016

Gareth Edwards, Principal Policy and Performance Advisor, Norfolk Police/National Police Chiefs' Council, **Rosamund McNeil**, Head of Education and Equality, NUT, **Jane Millward**, Senior HMI, Ofsted, and **Gwendolyn Sterk**, National Services Development Officer, Welsh Women's Aid

[Q143–208](#)

Tuesday 5 July 2016

Rebecca Asher, author, **David Brockway**, Project Manager, Great Men, and **Professor Nicky Stanley**, Professor of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire

[Q209–237](#)

Tuesday 12 July 2016

Karen Bradley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, **Caroline Dinenage MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, Department for Education, and **Edward Timpson MP**, Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education

[Q238–275](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SVS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Anonymous ([SVS0005](#))
- 2 Anonymous ([SVS0047](#))
- 3 Anti-Bullying Alliance, National Children's Bureau ([SVS0018](#))
- 4 Association of Teachers and Lecturers ([SVS0071](#))
- 5 AVA (against violence and abuse) ([SVS0079](#))
- 6 Big Talk Education ([SVS0048](#))
- 7 Birmingham City University ([SVS0093](#))
- 8 British Board of Film Classification ([SVS0057](#))
- 9 British Psychological Society ([SVS0046](#))
- 10 Brook ([SVS0055](#))
- 11 Bryntirion Comprehensive School ([SVS0062](#))
- 12 Cambridgeshire Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Partnership ([SVS0036](#))
- 13 Centre for Gender Equal Media ([SVS0026](#))
- 14 Child & Woman Abuse Studies Unit ([SVS0039](#))
- 15 Connect Centre ([SVS0024](#))
- 16 Coventry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre ([SVS0034](#))
- 17 Crown Prosecution Service ([SVS0097](#))
- 18 Department for Education ([SVS0088](#))
- 19 Department for Education ([SVS0098](#))
- 20 Dr Andrea Richardson ([SVS0094](#))
- 21 Dr Trevor Baxter ([SVS0014](#))
- 22 Dr Vanita Sundaram ([SVS0042](#))
- 23 End Violence Against Women Coalition ([SVS0058](#))
- 24 Everyday Sexism Project ([SVS0077](#))
- 25 Family Education Trust ([SVS0051](#))
- 26 FPA ([SVS0033](#))
- 27 Girlguiding ([SVS0061](#))
- 28 Growing Against Violence ([SVS0022](#))
- 29 Miss Emily Setty ([SVS0035](#))
- 30 Mr Matthew Abraham ([SVS0067](#))
- 31 Mr Richard Bryer ([SVS0009](#))
- 32 Mrs Jessica Warne ([SVS0007](#))
- 33 Mrs Maggie Goren ([SVS0010](#))
- 34 Ms Claire Savage ([SVS0083](#))

- 35 Ms Lucy Johnson ([SVS0070](#))
- 36 Ms Vera Baird QC ([SVS0038](#))
- 37 NASUWT Teachers' Union ([SVS0072](#))
- 38 National Police Chiefs' Council—Children and Young Person Business area ([SVS0085](#))
- 39 National Union of Students ([SVS0069](#))
- 40 National Union of Teachers ([SVS0032](#))
- 41 Newid Fem ([SVS0043](#))
- 42 Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families ([SVS0060](#))
- 43 NSPCC ([SVS0089](#))
- 44 Ofsted ([SVS0023](#))
- 45 Oldham Council ([SVS0086](#))
- 46 OnePlusOne ([SVS0056](#))
- 47 Plan International UK ([SVS0066](#))
- 48 Plymouth University ([SVS0020](#))
- 49 Professor Emma Renold ([SVS0037](#))
- 50 Professor Sonia Livingstone ([SVS0064](#))
- 51 PSHE Association ([SVS0021](#))
- 52 Public Health Bristol City Council ([SVS0044](#))
- 53 Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SVS0059](#))
- 54 Rape Crisis South London ([SVS0076](#))
- 55 Rebecca Asher ([SVS0096](#))
- 56 Sex Education Forum ([SVS0075](#))
- 57 Simon Bailey, National Police Chiefs' Council ([SVS0092](#))
- 58 Solace Women's Aid ([SVS0054](#))
- 59 SPUC Safe at School ([SVS0040](#))
- 60 St Giles Trust ([SVS0016](#))
- 61 Stonewall ([SVS0052](#))
- 62 Students A to F ([SVS0050](#))
- 63 Tender Education & Arts ([SVS0084](#))
- 64 The ASBAE Project ([SVS0017](#))
- 65 The Children's Society ([SVS0087](#))
- 66 The GREAT Initiative ([SVS0091](#))
- 67 Tough Cookies Education Ltd ([SVS0045](#))
- 68 UCL Institute of Education ([SVS0041](#))
- 69 UK Feminista ([SVS0029](#))
- 70 Universities UK ([SVS0053](#))
- 71 University of Bedfordshire ([SVS0065](#))
- 72 University of the West of England ([SVS0100](#))

- 73 Victim Support ([SVS0073](#))
- 74 Women and Girls Network ([SVS0078](#))
- 75 Women's Equality Party ([SVS0080](#))
- 76 Women's Resource Centre ([SVS0049](#))
- 77 Youth Justice Board for England and Wales ([SVS0031](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

First Report	Transgender Equality	HC 390 (Cm 9301)
Second Report	Gender Pay Gap	HC 584
Third Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission	HC 599

Session 2016–17

First Report	Maternity and pregnancy discrimination	HC 90
Second Report	Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK	HC 89