

Stay Safe East statement on the Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges

June 2021



Stay Safe East welcomes the Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges¹, an essential and long needed investigation into an issue that often goes undetected. However, we are extremely concerned about the exclusion of Deaf and disabled children from the review and the implications of this. As outlined in the Methodology section, the sample sizes were not sufficient to draw conclusions about the protection of disabled children. Whilst there is a dearth of research into the sexual abuse of disabled children in schools, especially that conducted in the UK, it has been found that sexual abuse is particularly prevalent in Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools². This is mirrored in US-based research, finding that disabled children are significantly more likely to be sexually abused at school than their nondisabled counterparts³. Thus, their exclusion from the review represents a notable failing to account for a group at increased risk of sexual abuse.

One area where the exclusion of disabled children is brought sharply into view is that of the review's consideration for the adequacy of RSHE/PSHE curriculum. We have long been aware of, and concerned about, the exclusion of disabled children and their experiences from RSHE/PSHE. This review could have provided an opportunity to investigate and address these inadequacies with a view to the active inclusion of disabled children in the RSHE/PSHE curriculum in future. Instead, this opportunity to educate has been missed, meaning that

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>

² Fyson, R. (2007). 'Young people with learning disabilities who sexually abuse: understanding, identifying and responding from within generic education and welfare services'.

³ <http://www.eparent.com/features-3/schools-must-protect-students-with-disabilities-from-sexual-harassment/>

disabled children are still not afforded the skills and education to cultivate and navigate healthy relationships in the way that nondisabled children are.

We have some experience of working with young women who have been sexually harassed in schools, experiencing this as gender-based harassment rooted in their difference as disabled young women. Especially considering the context within which sexual harassment against girls and young women is rarely recognized or addressed in schools, the exclusion of those who are Deaf and disabled from this review constitutes an oversight which we are in no doubt will have tangible ramifications for this group.

Whilst the review stresses the need for further research into the prevalence and experiences of disabled children, Stay Safe East are calling for concrete plans regarding the date of completion for this research, as well as how the government will ensure that disabled young people and adults will be involved in each stage of the process.

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