



COMMENT

Scandal of widespread sexual abuse in schools reveals urgent need for guidance

Schools must introduce codes of conduct to explain to pupils what constitutes an offence and what sentences could follow

Anne Whyte

Thursday April 29 2021, 12.01am, The Times

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The widespread abuse described on the website [Everyone's Invite](#) undoubtedly signifies a failure or inability of schools and government to educate pupils and students in the definition and potential effects of such incidents.

The collective experiences [posted on the website](#) include the commission of criminal offences — many of them of a sexual nature.

Given that by the age of ten children are deemed capable of committing criminal offences, the curriculum needs to include guidance about what constitutes an offence, especially a sexual one, and what sort of sentences and orders the courts can impose.

Teachers and parents also need to be educated in this area. Children of primary school age need to be taught about what makes relationships healthy, respectful and safe. Children at secondary school and students in higher education need further information on how and why certain behaviours are criminalised, what victims can do about it, how matters are investigated and what to expect in the event of prosecution or conviction.

This [process of education](#) should start when a child or young person first enrolls at an educational establishment and it should include a code of conduct as part of the induction. Categorising behaviours in a code has the obvious advantage of discriminating between acceptable and unacceptable conduct from the get-go.

The code should contain a clear statement of what the establishment expects from its pupils in terms of various aspects of school life, including communications with, and attitudes towards, other students.

Such a code must be appropriate in language and content for varying ages and it should be provided to parents and carers. Its existence should be published throughout school premises on noticeboards and online platforms. It should contain an uncomplicated description of how the establishment will handle complaints of abuse by pupils towards pupils, including internal sanctions and in more serious cases, referrals to the local safeguarding officer or police.

The code must reflect the relevant law. In secondary school, it should identify some of the more commonly encountered criminal offences, for example: rape, sexual assault, causing sexual activity without consent, child sex acts, making, sharing and possessing indecent images — and the powers of the

criminal courts to sentence offenders and impose sexual harm prevention orders.

If necessary, this could be a straightforward dos and don'ts checklist that applies as much to social media activity as it does to direct verbal and physical contact.

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A code will need to be reinforced by the delivery of far more powerful and pertinent sexual and relationship education that steers teenagers through complex issues such as consent and intoxication, along with the potentially long-lasting effects of investigation and criminal conviction.

Anne Whyte, QC, is a tenant at QEB Hollis Whiteman chambers in London and is heading the independent inquiry into alleged abuse in British gymnastics; Rebecca Harris and Orla Daly from the same set contributed to this article

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Chris Emmings



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Silver Lady

1 DAY AGO



I agree with this - although it's sad that we need this. There is also a major issue following allegations of rape / sexual assault where the right to an education of both the alleged victim and perpetrator collide. There are too many instances where victims have to confront perpetrators on a daily basis in a school while the rights of the perpetrator who is 'innocent until proved guilty' also need protecting. Schools repeatedly find themselves in an impossible position trying to manage the situation with a lack of guidance for managing these distressing and challenging circumstances.

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Alan

14 HOURS AGO



The culture is, that if you make an accusation you will be believed, it's not surprising there are far more accusations now than ever before. With police being found to 'construct' cases against people, possibly due to public pressure and or internal pressure, or even perhaps improved promotion prospects, the CPS are being presented with unbalanced evidence. Ask any defence lawyer there options on the lack of balance when

it comes to the polices collection of evidence.

If we are not very very careful we are about to make the biggest legal mistake ever and lock up a lot of innocent children. This prospect leaves me cold!

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Jamie Gerry

1 DAY AGO

Why do children suddenly seem not to know right from wrong? Parents? Media? Atheism?

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Christopher Parker > Jamie Gerry

15 HOURS AGO

Social media, and pictures of people breaking the law.

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Coandalift

12 HOURS AGO

Allowing people of any age to identify as the opposite gender and allowing them into single sex facilities will only make this problem worse.

Having mixed sex lavatories in schools is a really bad idea.

MRS C.

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