

**A REVIEW INTO HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS AT WESTMINSTER SCHOOL**

**AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

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READER ADVISORY: THIS REPORT CONTAINS CONTENT OF A SENSITIVE NATURE,  
INCLUDING REFERENCES TO EXPLICIT CONTENT AND DESCRIPTIONS OF SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE

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## A: Introduction

The [terms of reference](#) set by the Chair and Governors of Westminster School were to identify the extent of the problem of harmful sexual behaviours at Westminster School (“the School”), in the context of the national picture as set out at Annexure 2, and to make recommendations for the future which will hopefully serve further to protect all pupils at the School. This is the summary of those findings.

I attach at Annexure 1 a description of the methodology used in carrying out the work of the review. In consultation with the School, I used a risk-based approach in presenting my findings. To keep children and young people safe, one has to identify the risks to them, and also determining what a school can do about that. The purpose of this review is to assist the leadership of the School to take action to reduce the risk of harm to its pupils.

In order to understand the risks of sexual violence and risk of harassment to pupils at the School, one examines the national problems (**endemic risks**); then examines the extent to which the same risks apply or are increased or lessened for pupils at Westminster (**school risks**); to identify those measures already taken by the School before and since Easter 2021, and to suggest measures to be taken by the School in order further to mitigate risks (**future risks**).

It is my hope in adopting this approach that the governors and senior management of the School will be better able to quantify and prioritise the risks of sexual violence and harassment between pupils, with an aim to devise policies, practices and procedures which can then be implemented to examine if the risks have been lessened or mitigated in some way. This could be by way of a risk register – a dynamic document which will serve as an action plan for senior leadership as a tool to aid effective governance of the risks by governors. The advantage of such an approach is that it can be revised and monitored on a regular basis by both senior leaders and governors in order to review the management of both existing risks and to identify new and emerging risks.

Westminster School has been a site of education for 1000 years. It has an excellent worldwide reputation for the quality of its academic teaching, and a strong “liberal” ethos encouraging intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and the encouragement of its pupils to have a wide range of intellectual interests and passions. It has many famous alumni across a range of fields. Until the early 1970s, it was an all boys’ school. From that point, it has accepted women into the school from age 16-18, on both a day and boarding basis. This report concerns the “Great School” which educates students from the age of 13–18. There is also an Under School which has not been examined in as much detail. As the vast majority of incidents concerned those between 16-18, this focus was felt to be appropriate at this stage but, where appropriate, issues and recommendations relating to the Under School have been set out.

At present, around 160 pupils in the post-16 school are women, with around 80 in each year. Between 60-70<sup>1</sup> are boarders. These numbers have increased over the past twenty years but are still not at parity with boys (there are approximately 120 boys in each year group).

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<sup>1</sup> Figures taken from Pastoral Report Lent Term 2021.

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This review explores difficult, sensitive and nuanced subjects. The issues are uncomfortable. There are no easy or unambiguous answers to resolving the problems of harmful sexual behaviours against women and girls in our society. There is a need for structural, cultural and societal changes in all institutions, which includes all schools, but is not just limited to these institutions. Schools do not operate in a vacuum: their ethos, attitudes and approaches reflect the society around us. This society in turn needs to change. Moreover, issues of homophobia and transphobia must also be explored, as sexual assault is not limited solely to male / female interactions. As a multi-cultural institution, the intersection of race, nationality, ethnicity and sex must also be explored.

Furthermore, it does a disservice to young people to seek to explain the world of teenage sexual exploration and experience as one in which the only issue is that of “consent.” Young people do not just want to know about the criminal law – they want to know how to create positive relationships; how to have “good” sex; and how to deal with the many conflicting, ambiguous and overwhelming emotions that engaging in sex or seeking to construct emotional, romantic or sexual relationships involves. That is something which cannot be solely left to educators within school.

Violence against women hurts men. It is vitally important to recognise that eradicating harmful sexual behaviours does not come at the expense of young men’s opportunities and chances; nor does it involve the creation of a “gynocracy” in which men are diminished. There are in this country palpable and very serious problems involving young men in particular. Many more young men than women commit suicide. Many men have intractable mental health problems which they are less likely to have addressed than women. They have been brought up in a society which has undertaken a mass experiment in allowing young men to watch pornography without limits. They may have been exposed to ideas within the so-called “manosphere” which legitimizes violence against women as a natural reaction to their own lack of opportunities and chances. Young men should not be demonised. They are as much in need of support and education as the young women in this situation.

The conclusions and recommendations in this report are not designed to impose an agenda where only approved subjects can be discussed, and trigger warnings surround every discussion. Far from it: there needs to be open debate and discussion to blow open the ignorance and misunderstandings which surround this subject. Westminster as a school has always been unafraid of debate, criticism and discussion: it should therefore view the unflinching nature of this review as closely allied to its core ethos. There is a real opportunity for the School to develop a curriculum, and reinforce a culture, which seeks to engage both sexes in a more informed critical analysis of issues of sex, gender and violence.

This report reflects above all the views of a remarkable and courageous group of young people who have been frank, forthright, and thoughtful about their time at school. This report is dedicated to the current and past students at Westminster School, who are “*being the change*” that society needs.

## B. The National Picture

In order to understand the risks faced by pupils at the School, it is essential to understand the society in which it exists and the impact which different influences in that society have upon the lives of young people. Whilst those educated at the School have exceptional academic ability, this does not make them immune to the society around them, nor radically different to other teenagers in how they live their lives.

Everyone's Invited was launched on Instagram in 2020 and since March 2021 over 54,000 anonymous testimonies have been posted by pupils at state and independent schools.

Given the national statistics below, it seems likely that those who posted testimonies were self-selecting rather than a representative sample of wider society.

Surveys and research over the last twenty years indicate that the UK has a national problem of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence between children.

- OFSTED in its report, [\*Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges\*](#), in June 2021 reported the findings of its questionnaire responses from girls:
  - 92% had experienced sexist name-calling.
  - 80% had received unwanted or inappropriate comments of a sexual nature.
  - 88% reported receiving pictures or videos of a sexual nature they did not want to see.
  - 80% reported being put under pressure to provide sexual images of themselves.
  - 73% had experienced videos or pictures which they had shared, or had been shared more widely by the recipient without consent.
  - 79% reported having suffered a sexual assault of some kind.
  - 68% reported feeling pressured to do sexual things that they did not want to do.
  - 64% complained of unwanted touching.
- The Women and Equalities Committee of the Houses of Parliament reported in 2016 that sexual violence and harassment in schools was a significant issue which needed to be tackled urgently.
- The NEU / UK Feminista 2017 study entitled "It's just everywhere" identified that over a third of female students at mixed sex schools had personally experienced some form of sexual harassment and a quarter had been subject to unwanted sexual touching while at school.
- Research published by Bristol University in 2020 examined the experience of teenage girls from 1950 to 1980 which included numerous testimonies of sexual harassment, abuse, coercion, assault and rape by fellow teenagers.

- Girlguiding UK's annual 2021 survey of girls aged between 13 and 18 found that 67% had experienced sexual harassment from another student.

Research and surveys nationally have looked beyond the scale and nature of sexual violence and harassment between pupils, to some of the factors believed to underlie it.

These include:

- The widespread access to, and influence of, pornography upon the attitudes of young men to young women and how it can encourage violence against women and objectify women as solely sex objects. Over 66% of 14-15 year-olds had seen such material. A literature review issued by government in 2021 found "substantial" evidence of an association between exposure to pornography and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours towards women.
- Ignorance about sex and relationships, and in particular what they should look like and how to have a healthy relationship. A lack of understanding of consent – whilst young people understand this in the abstract, their concrete understanding of what are consensual relationships is bedevilled by misunderstanding and assumptions.
- The influence of social media which contributes to a quest for perfection and materially affects how both young men and women feel about themselves and their body image.
- The continuing perpetuation of gendered norms within our society and the prevalence of misogynistic attitudes, in particular in the online world (including video games) with the growth of the "manosphere" which promotes violence against women and misogynistic approaches.
- Mental health problems and concerns which have been significantly exacerbated by the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had upon the mental health of young people. 16% of children aged 5-16 have a probable mental health disorder, with 27.2% of women aged 17-22 having such a disorder and 13.3% of young men.
- A view that the lives of young women will inevitably involve sexist remarks, unwanted attention, and harassment and that this had to be tolerated.
- Abuse of drink and drugs – 66% of those aged 15-16 drink alcohol regularly and 38% of 15-16 year-olds have taken drugs.
- Women aged 10-24 are disproportionately more likely to be the victim of sexual offences as recorded by the police, than men of the same age. Full-time students were more likely than any other occupational group to have experienced sexual assault in the last year.
- Online grooming has increased significantly over the past four years, and girls represent 83% of those targeted.
- Being the subject of sexual harassment on the street and in public places as young women.
- Continuing toleration of homophobic bullying as part and parcel of growing up.

- Prejudice and discrimination towards transgender people.
- Young people not reporting sexist remarks on the basis that it was to be expected or normal, or nothing would happen if it were brought to the attention of adults.
- Continuing racism and stereotypical attitudes and approaches towards non -white women and girls (as well as young men).
- Guilt and shame following on from sexual harassment and assaults preventing reporting and a fear of being blamed for the incident.

A more detailed analysis and literature review relating to the national picture is attached at 0 to this report.

## **C: The Westminster School Picture**

### **Pupil Survey**

In order to gain an accurate and detailed picture of the risks of harmful sexual behaviours between pupils in the School the review carried out a survey between 14 June 2021 and the end of the summer term. This was made available to the whole School and received 281 responses. A selection of the results are as follows:

- 94% of pupils surveyed expressed their happiness at School socially (e.g. developing friendships and feeling accepted) rating between 3 and 5 / 5 (where 5 is very happy and 3 is middling). Of those 94%, 76% were either very happy or happy.
- 85% of pupils surveyed rated their personal happiness at School (e.g. mental health and wellbeing) between 3 and 5 / 5, with 59% either very happy or happy.
- 86% of pupils surveyed rated their physical happiness (i.e. getting sufficient exercise, healthy food and fresh air) between 3 and 5 / 5 with 65% either very happy or happy.
- 25% of pupils surveyed had experienced sexual discrimination, unwanted sharing of images or physical / verbal harmful sexual behaviours. 5% of those who had experienced such a negative incident had reported it.
- 65% of girls surveyed had experienced at least one instance of sexual discrimination, unwanted sharing of images, or physical / verbal harmful sexual behaviour. 41% of girls who answered said they had experienced such a negative incident on more than one occasion.
- 43% of pupils surveyed had witnessed an incident of sexual discrimination, unwanted sharing of images, or physical / verbal sexually harmful behaviour. 10% of those who had witnessed such behaviour had reported it.
- 71% of pupils surveyed rated how the School dealt with issues of sexual discrimination, or harmful sexual behaviour towards another pupil in school between 3 and 5 / 5 (with 5 being very well). 38% of those rated the School's handling very well or well.
- 40% of pupils surveyed rated the School's handling of similar incidents occurring outside School between 3 and 5 / 5, of which 14% regarded the School's handling as either very well or well handled. 33% felt the School had handled incidents occurring outside School not at all well and 27% not well.
- 50% of pupils surveyed rated the handling of issues of sexual discrimination or harmful sexual behaviour within the curriculum between 3 and 5 / 5, with 30% thinking it was well or very well handled and 50% thinking it not at all well, or not well handled.

### **Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) Survey**

Before the completion of this review ISI carried out a pupil survey at the School as part of its recent additional compliance inspection. It is significant that in the critical areas of feeling happy at school, understanding how to make friends and develop positive relationships,

believing that the school takes issues of bullying, discriminatory conduct, unwanted sexual behaviour seriously, and feeling able to look for support from staff if concerned about such conduct, well over 80% of pupils answered affirmatively. Notably the only area which received less (and in some respects considerably less) than 80% approval from pupils was the area of relationship and sex education (RSE) teaching, which mirrors the finding in the review team's survey, and to which I will return later in the recommendations.

## **Testimonies**

Through the 44 Westminster-related posts on Everyone's Invited that were considered during the course of the review, 75 comments on the Westminster Testimonies and other contacts received from current or former pupils, a number of traumatic accounts have been shared of experiences where pupils have suffered harmful sexual behaviours from other pupils. Whilst it is not possible for the review team (and beyond our remit) to establish the veracity of individual testimonies, I have treated each as honest and truthful in the absence of compelling reasons to discount its contents.

Overall, the testimonies cover allegations ranging from sexist remarks through to more serious harmful sexual behaviour. They showed that sexist or inappropriate behaviours by young men towards young women were the most common issues across all testimonies.

The key themes which are apparent from these testimonies are accounts of:

- Sexual harassment, primarily made up of verbal comments, online comments, or the sharing of sexual images without consent.
- Abusive relationships, sexual and sexist bullying.
- Sexual assault and unwanted physical contact.
- Rape and misunderstanding of, or ignorance related to, issues of consent in sexual activity.
- A culture which has contributed to sexual violence and harassment between pupils, described in the testimonies variously as sexist, misogynistic, disrespectful or transactional, sometimes as a result of deference towards, or a different expectation of moral standards from, certain popular or charismatic individuals within the peer group.

## **Interviews**

In the numerous interviews which I conducted (with current pupils, recent pupils, a small number of non-recent pupils, parents, both current and past, current and former staff and governors), there was much thought given to the underlying or contributing factors to the behaviours shared. It should be said that all the pupils or former pupils, and parents and former parents, whom I interviewed were self-selecting, which is why I also commissioned the pupil survey – the results of which are analysed elsewhere in this report.

Drawing out the themes from the interviews undertaken as to underlying or contributory factors to the behaviours complained of, the following were most apparent:

- Relationships with staff: whilst some non-recent pupils believed that the relationship between staff and pupils had been too close, most recent or current pupils were broadly praiseworthy of staff in terms of their professionalism or empathy. Staff acknowledged pupils were articulate, intelligent and sophisticated but that this could give the illusion of false maturity.
- “Loyal dissent”: whilst there was generally a good deal of respect within pupils and staff for the ethos of constructive questioning of established orthodoxies, some female pupils and staff felt that male pupils adopted contrarian positions to provoke reaction and assert status rather than foster debate. Some expressed frustration about insensitively chosen external speakers.
- School facilities: female pupils and staff complained that there were inadequate spaces for them to change and shower, and that Little Dean’s Yard was a place where they were made to feel uncomfortable on occasions as women because of its “macho” environment at times.
- Uniform: a number of female interviewees spoke of “double standards” being applied to uniform; with their uniform subject to more careful scrutiny than boys. Indeed some male staff felt uncomfortable enforcing skirt length on female pupils and this could lead to a sense of female pupils being held to a different standard.
- Social hierarchy: as with the testimonies there was a strong sense from pupil interviewees of a social hierarchy within the School where some male pupils’ status was dictated by familial wealth, academic success and charisma. Staff acknowledged that there were clearly a number of pupils from wealthy backgrounds with access to funds and a peer group of privileged young people.
- Impact of joining the School only at the age of 16: many female interviewees (both staff and students) spoke of the initial disadvantage which was felt in joining the preestablished social hierarchy (as above) in the Sixth Form, in contrast to male pupils who had the knowledge of the site, language, and routines. They also had established relationships with their peers and teachers.
- Sexism: interviewees described the prevailing school culture as sexist to some degree. Whilst the majority of pupils considered “everyday sexism” to be a widespread problem (double standards, ‘slut-shaming,’ rating pupils according to appearance) at the School and in society more broadly, there was a broad consensus that the most serious issues were confined to a small minority of pupils but this had a ripple effect on the perceptions and views of other students. Female pupils from an ethnic minority spoke of being at a double disadvantage since they were treated differently and assumptions were made about them on the basis both of their sex and ethnicity.
- Social media: this was, for many pupils and staff members, seen as a platform where sexual harassment and bullying occurred. Some pupil interviewees witnessed or experienced unsolicited sexual images as well as sexist, homophobic and racist bullying.

Platforms such as Snapchat and TikTok enable cyberbullying, but also the rapid spread of gossip and sexual harassment via online media means that there is little or no “escape” from it even when at home.

- Parties: interviewees said the most serious incidents of sexual harassment and violence had occurred out-of-school at parties or other social gatherings. Alcohol use and misuse at such parties was raised and some pupils spoke of a minority of pupils who had used drugs. Parties were seen by many pupils as reinforcing an attitude amongst some of “work hard, play hard” and an opportunity to let their hair down at the end of a hard week’s work. Interestingly, a number of pupils said that parties were more enjoyable and less hostile when parents adequately supervised them. Staff in turn felt frustrated that some parents were failing to supervise their children who have access to considerable resources and space with which to host parties. Without adequate supervision or input from the School the boundaries for acceptable and appropriate behaviour were lost and high-risk and / or disrespectful behaviours were normalised.
- Boarding: some female pupils regarded the additional security and protective measures in place for female boarders as outdated and paternalistic at best, and sexist at worst.
- Curriculum: pupils and staff recognised that the School had an exceptionally strong academic ethos where knowledge, inquiry and grades were highly valued and the pressure to perform academically within the student body was high. A number of female interviewees felt the curriculum did not sufficiently cover female authors or deal with women’s history (though I accept that may not entirely be within the School’s control). Others, however, said they felt that sensitive subjects such as literary depictions of sexual violence were not handled with sufficient sensitivity or professionalism in class – with some complaining of having to discuss extremely raw and sensitive issues (for example a literary description of rape where the female pupil concerned had herself experienced sexual violence) amongst immature peers.
- Sexism in lessons: a minority of pupils reported sexist experiences in lessons (such as not being given equal opportunity to comment, being in receipt of unkind comments or talked over by male pupils) and felt that these behaviours, when they occurred, were not always sufficiently challenged. The vast majority of pupils however praised the calibre of the teaching staff, albeit a number commented on the significant gender imbalance between male and female teachers. Female staff indicated the lack of female leaders until recently at senior management level.
- Relationship and Sex Education (RSE): interviews with both staff and pupils indicated on an almost unanimous basis that the School’s provision was seen to be inadequate, with some pupils going as far as saying it was essentially non-existent. Pupils felt there was too much focus on the technical and scientific rather than how to have healthy, happy and respectful relationships. The two issues raised most frequently as needing to be covered better were the effects of pornography and misconceptions regarding consent. There was a particular concern expressed about a lack of clear information about where pupils could gain access to contraception and sexual health services. Staff identified timetable constraints (perhaps reflecting traditional weight placed on academic subjects) as being significant factors holding back RSE, and there was considerable praise for the current heads of PSHE and Wellbeing who had done good jobs in the face of these factors. RSE was widely perceived by younger pupils at the Great School as “not necessary” or a “nuisance” which may well reflect the messages sent out subconsciously by the School by only providing it as a timetabled session over one year, and then fitting it around other demands of tutorial periods.

- Inclusion: whilst non-recent pupils identified homophobia in their day as a severe problem, current and recent pupils and staff described an atmosphere of inclusion, though some did refer to the residual use of the word “gay” as an insult and to homophobic bullying by individual pupils. Equally some examples were given by pupils of wholly unacceptable racist epithets, language or memes on social media, which were sometimes trivialised under the guise of being “ironic” – including in this anti-Semitism.
- School structure: a considerable number of interviewees amongst pupils and staff commented that both male and female pupils joining the Sixth Form from single sex environments may, in some cases, be naïve and may have had limited experience of interacting with the opposite sex in an academic setting. Some staff felt that sixteen was the most challenging age at which to make a single sex school co-educational.
- Pornography: many interviewees considered pornography to be a precipitating factor with its ease of access, the age at which pupils first saw pornographic images and the extreme nature of the activities depicted. Pupils also recognised that their use of pornography and its extreme nature was widely underestimated by staff and parents.
- School responses: given that much of the most serious harmful sexual behaviours took place out of school or online, there was a divergence of opinions among interviewees as to the extent to which the School was aware of it. A substantial number of pupils felt however, that the School “must know” about it and therefore blamed it for a culture which they believed resulted from a lack of enforcement of behavioural values. Many staff themselves felt that the School had missed an opportunity to set the boundaries for acceptable behaviour in parties hosted by pupils in Sixth Form, but expressed themselves to be uncomfortable in knowing how to enforce disciplinary standards outside of the school gates.
- Parents: a number of pupils commented that the parties with the worst behaviours were those without adequate parental supervision. A number also felt that parents had failed to instil values of equality, mutual respect and humility in their children. Very few pupils interviewed described having discussed sensitive issues such as pornography, sex, alcohol and drugs with their parents but those who had had found that to be useful.
- Importance of friendships or standing: the most common reason amongst pupils for not reporting or challenging sexual violence or harassment (whether occurring in or out of School) was a fear that to do so would be disruptive to pupils’ friendships, their work or prospects. Some pupils commented that the few pupils who had raised concerns had exposed themselves to intense scrutiny, judgment and speculation amongst their peers and that they had been socially ostracised or become pariahs on some occasions. Likewise, others felt that those who had been accused of abusive behaviours (without any definitive disciplinary conclusions being reached) had been “cancelled” by their friends unfairly and been subject to social ostracism and bullying by others. “Cancel” culture appeared to be a significant concern of the young people.

## **Review of Safeguarding and Disciplinary Files**

I reviewed the School’s safeguarding records, pupil disciplinary records and staff disciplinary records. These were contained in physical folders as well as computer records. I looked at

almost 200 safeguarding files and pupil files dating from the start of the twenty-first century. In addition, I reviewed the staff disciplinary files that remained on file. In cases which were particularly complex or relevant to our review, I undertook a 'deep dive' where I considered the case in detail. For the majority of other cases I analysed the issues in outline. I am conscious that I am considering these cases, first, with the benefit of hindsight, second, sometime after the event and, third, in the vast majority of circumstances without speaking to the pupils or staff members involved. Therefore, unless I have identified flaws in the decisionmaking process and where I have not found documentary evidence that suggests a decision was plainly wrong, I have respected the discretion of the decision-makers at the time and not sought to substitute our judgment but I have commented where I believe I would have come to a different decision and explained why. I differentiated between decisions which I disagreed with but which I believe are defensible (i.e. within the bounds of a reasonable response) and a few decisions where I believe Westminster outright erred. The contents of those records are highly confidential not only because they predominantly concern young people, but they also reveal highly sensitive material. Consideration of specific incidents and decisions was provided in a confidential report for consideration of the present school governors and leadership.

Our findings concerning safeguarding and disciplinary files are contained in the overall findings. With specific regard to these documents, our findings are summarised below:

- I have found that Westminster was aware of the structural issues that underpinned some of the harmful sexual behaviour experienced by the pupils and there were some informal discussions between senior staff about these in 2006, 2011/12 and in 2016/17. What did not then happen was a comprehensive review and / or consideration of making structural changes to the School. Some steps were taken to address issues by additional assemblies, discussion in FemSoc (feminist society) and visiting speakers, alongside alterations to the wellbeing curriculum; but this review finds that these sorts of one-off steps have been insufficient to change the culture and are unlikely to do so in future.
- I have uncovered no evidence that Westminster was negligent, dismissive, or reckless of its safeguarding duties. On the contrary, I have found that safeguarding was considered of paramount importance. The nature and extent of how those duties were discharged and what happened have been the subject of change since 2003 and the records reflect this.
- I have found that Westminster was not always provided with advice and guidance from Children's Services which the reviewer considers, with the benefit of hindsight, was consistently correct. However, the ultimate responsibility for those decisions rests with the School. Whilst the School dealt with every case as well as it could there has not, until this review was commissioned, been a "standing back" to look over time to see if issues of sexism and harmful sexual behaviours were not just "one off" incidents but part of a broader trend linked to structural issues relating to the culture of the institution. I believe that the vast majority of staff and pupil disciplinary decisions were reasonable and proportionate. However, I have identified a few cases where I felt the School should have been more robust with staff. Similarly, for pupils I have identified a few cases where I believe that the School was too generous. Each case hinges on its own facts but I believe that the difference between consensual sexual activity compared to harmful sexual activity is not always sufficiently delineated.

- Record keeping had been unsatisfactory in too many cases in the past. It is now exceptionally good.
- The School did make referrals to the LADO where required and acted upon their advice and guidance. DSLs seemed to have a good and strong relationship with the LADOs from the records seen. They attended courses and talks. They sought external advice when they were concerned about pupils and made referrals to specialist services. They reported matters to the police in line with their statutory responsibilities.

## **D: A Risk Based Approach**

The understanding which I have gained of the national picture and how the School reflects that picture in the context of harmful sexual behaviours would be of limited value if it were not accompanied by a meaningful exercise of categorising and assessing the seriousness of the main risks and identifying measures designed to reduce the severity of those risks.

### **Categories of Risk**

The disclosures of sexual violence and harassment identified both nationally and at school level can logically be grouped within the following risk categories:

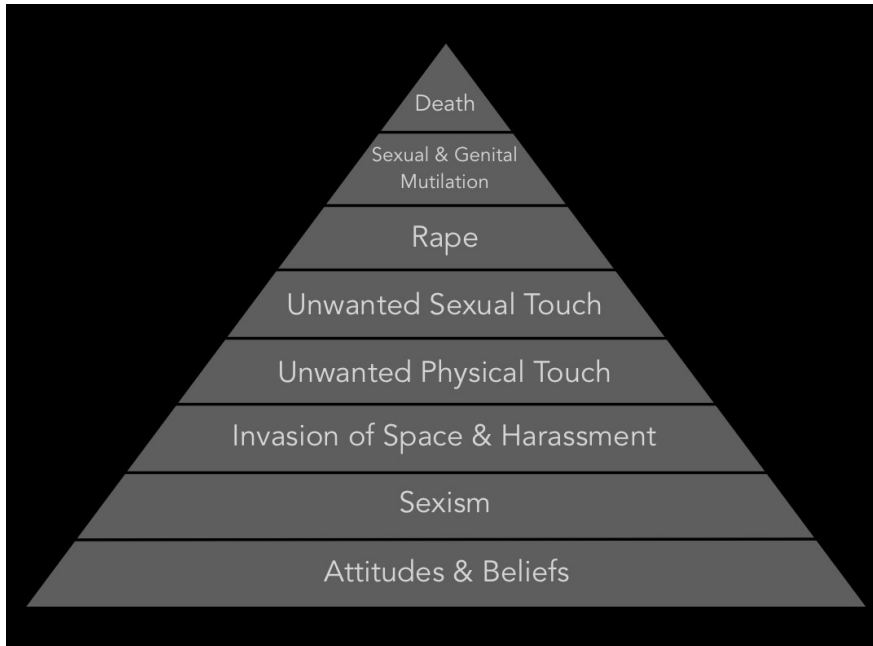
- Sexual violence in school.
- Sexual violence out of school.
- Sexual violence online.
- Sexual harassment in school.
- Sexual harassment out of school.
- Sexual harassment online.

To these risk categories I think it essential to add the following two risks:

- Attitudes, beliefs and influences which objectify or demean on grounds of sex, gender or sexual orientation.
- A permissive culture amongst pupils which either facilitates or permits sexism, sexist banter or behaviour or derogatory language, attitudes and behaviours towards the LGBTQ plus community.

### **Sexual Violence Pyramid**

Sexual violence against women (or against others) is described in mainstream research as being at the apex of a pyramid of behaviours, at the base of which lie individual attitudes and beliefs. This is referred to as the sexual violence pyramid (see below).



The pyramid represents a continuum of behaviours progressing upwards through sexism, harassment, unwanted physical touch and unwanted sexual touch to sexual assault and rape. This is what Everyone’s Invited refers to when talking about “rape culture” and most experienced commentators agree that any solutions to tackling sexual violence at the top of the pyramid have to involve tackling and ideally removing the foundations and intermediary steps of that pyramid. That ultimately involves tackling attitudes and beliefs which are often called “culture.” In an organisation like Westminster, who has existed in some way shape or form for over 1,000 years, tackling those beliefs and attitudes is a long-term process.

### Assessing and Rating Risk

A standard risk assessment matrix (as below) typically assesses risk in terms of likelihood and impact, producing a score or risk rating by multiplying the likelihood and impact scores for each risk. Using the matrix below for example, a risk which was assessed as very likely with a severe impact would be scored as 5x5=25, and the overall risk rated as high.

		Impact →				
		Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Severe
Likelihood ↑	Very Likely	Low Med	Medium	Med Hi	High	High
	Likely	Low	Low Med	Medium	Med Hi	High
	Possible	Low	Low Med	Medium	Med Hi	Med Hi
	Unlikely	Low	Low Med	Low Med	Medium	Med Hi
	Very Unlikely	Low	Low	Low Med	Medium	Medium

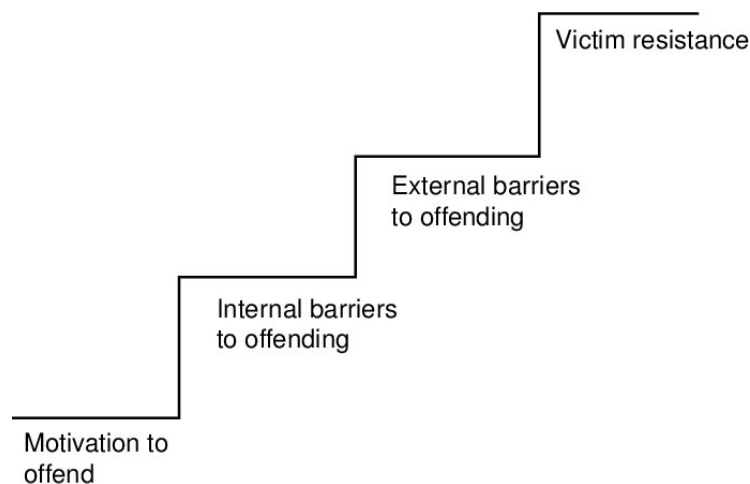
In the case of risks relating to harmful sexual behaviours between pupils I consider there is a value in assessing and rating each of the categories of risk at three stages. First, and taking

account of the national picture which I have described, to assess the **endemic risk** posed by each risk category identified. Secondly, and taking account of the School picture which I have described, to assess the level of each risk in the School's own setting (factoring in the preexisting mitigation measures which the School already had in place to address those risks). I will refer to this as the **school risk**. Finally, and taking into account such mitigation measures as the School has taken since the issues raised by Everyone's Invited and those further mitigation measures which I now recommend, to assess the level of **future risk**.

## Mitigating Risk

In proposing measures to mitigate future risk I have been guided by the sexual pyramid model explained above, namely that in order to reduce risk of sexual violence at the top of the pyramid it is essential to reduce risk of facilitating cultures, behaviours and attitudes lower down and at the base of the pyramid.

Another helpful model by which I have been guided is that of Finkelhor's four-stage preconditions to offending (see below).



In this model Finkelhor illustrates these four pre-conditions as hurdles which an individual must overcome in order to offend, namely (a) their own motivation, (b) internal barriers to offending (such as values or conscience), (c) external barriers to offending (such as supervision or the risk of being caught), and (d) victim resistance. Therefore, when contemplating measures to mitigate each of the risks identified it is important to look at ways in respect of each risk of (a) reducing the motivation to offend, (b) increasing internal barriers, (c) increasing external barriers, and (d) increasing victim resistance.

## E: Examining Individual Risks

The individual risks set out above, having been identified, need to be assessed by way of analysis in terms of the **endemic risk** nationally, the **school risk** taking into account existing mitigation measures and the aspirational **future risk**, taking into account recent measures taken by the School and the future mitigation measures which I now propose should be adopted. For the purposes of this exercise, I will take each identified risk in turn starting at the bottom of the sexual violence pyramid and working upwards.

## **Attitudes, beliefs and influences which objectify or demean on grounds of sex or sexual orientation**

*Endemic Risk* – based on national research it is hard to assess the endemic risk as anything less than **medium high**. The likelihood of pupils and young people nationally developing unhealthy attitudes to relationships and sex (in part due to influences such as social media and pornography) is **very likely**, and the impact of that on those young people and peers as they grow up is at the very least **moderate**.

*School Risk* – the School does of course already have in place numerous educational and pastoral strategies designed to shape pupils' attitudes and beliefs, the impact of which must be to reduce the endemic risk to some extent. These include:

- Its existing PHSE and RSE provision, which has been thoroughly revised in the light of Everyone's Invited and the Testimonies, with input from a pupil wellbeing committee, and completely overhauled in terms of delivery within the curriculum following these inputs and the recent ISI inspection.
- An emphasis in its teaching and learning on challenging received wisdom and norms, with rigour and respect – the latter a frequent theme in talks and assemblies with pupils.
- A system of expectations and sanctions which have been revised to give further clarity and weight around harmful sexual behaviours, which are clearly stated as unacceptable.
- An emphasis on confidence and the ability to speak with adults and peers as partners, even on controversial issues.
- A recognition and celebration of academic excellence which encourages diversity of concepts of "masculinity" and "femininity" and more broadly encourages the development of thought-provoking questioning of received wisdom.
- A staff which is reflective and thoughtful about issues of discrimination against women and the LGBTQ plus community and which promotes respectful and professional relationships between staff and between staff and pupils.
- An environment in which safeguarding and wellbeing is a central concern of staff, and which has a comprehensive suite of policies and guidance, and which undertakes regular training.
- A tutorial system which encourages pupils to model their behaviours on those of trusted and responsible adults.
- A culture of positive and caring pastoral responses to individual situations and concerns.
- A school counsellor, (female since 2021), two further teachers with counselling training and access to counselling services from the Brent Centre (since 2021).
- A school medical centre, including a GP available. There is also a School Nursing Sister on site who, along with her team, has experience of working with teenagers and young adults and has a special interest in supporting mental health.

- Pupils who are capable of forming and sharing their own considered opinions rather than “following the crowd”.

Whilst the impact of these mitigating factors should be taken into account, one needs to recognise that the School is not an island, and there is only so much that any school can achieve in the face of strong societal headwinds. To the extent that some pupils at the School have developed unhealthy attitudes or beliefs around relationships and sex, the likelihood is that those attitudes were already forming before joining the School and continue to form through influences outside the classroom and amongst their peer group in social and unstructured situations. In view of this societal context, I do not consider that the School has succeeded in reducing this overall risk below **medium**, in that I consider the risk remains at least **likely** and its impact remains **moderate**.

*Future Risk* – I consider that in order to reduce risk further over the coming years, the School needs to put in place a number of additional mitigation measures as follows:

- Review and develop the comprehensive overhaul of the RSE curriculum (including effective staff training and dedicated time in the timetable throughout all school years to deal with these issues). The curriculum must include emphasis on how to create healthy relationships and practical considerations of negotiating and managing sex so that it is a positive experience for all, including specific consideration of training, teaching, support and guidance for those who are neurodiverse recognising the context of their particular needs and their need for specific support and guidance to manage some of these issues.
- Consider greater training of housemasters, tutors and matrons (together with consideration of how the role of tutor and matron might be further enhanced and supported) to provide them with better skills to deal with pastoral issues within and beyond the formal curriculum, in particular support around the mental health of young people and reflective listening.
- Develop a whole-school approach to tackling sexism which should include but is not limited to annual surveys of staff and students; explicit discussion and teaching concerning gendered norms, gender stereotypes and tropes, explicit training and teaching of gender equality, and training and teaching of race, and sexual orientation and transgender equality throughout the curriculum, accompanied by appropriate training. This should include using the curriculum to provide such teaching and training, with all subject staff actively looking for places where this can be woven in.
- Develop the education of young men to become “good men” which involves recognising and identifying ways in which men need to be supported and helped, given the distorted images projected by society about them. Many programmes are available which focus on this (and details of such programmes have been provided to the School). This is not just a “one off talk” but should be embedded as far as possible throughout pastoral care, extra-curricular activities and in the curriculum.
- Develop a system of education and support for parents in listening and providing advice to their children in respect of matters such as pornography and discrimination based on

the grounds of sex, gender and sexual orientation which runs alongside the programme delivered to the pupils of the School.

- Undertake a review of the external speakers' programme which ensures a range and balance of views. It should explicitly address concerns that free speech can sometimes be used as a "Trojan Horse" for discriminatory or offensive arguments which cannot be justified as essential given the age of the children and the School's duties under the Equality Act 2010
- Enhance training of staff and students about the Equality Act 2010 and other international law instruments concerning the elimination of discrimination and promotion of the rights of children and young people (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Of all the risks which the School has to tackle, the challenge of changing pupils' attitudes and beliefs and removing external influences such as pornography will be amongst the hardest to achieve. In aspiring to do so, the School should seek to reduce the risk from likely to **possible**, and through the education of its cohort to reduce the impact from moderate to **minor**, taking overall risk from medium to **low medium**.

### **A permissive culture which either facilitates or tolerates sexism, sexist banter or behaviour**

*Endemic Risk* – again based on published national research the endemic risk must be assessed as **medium high**. Children grow up in a culture which, to date, has been **very likely** to tolerate sexism, sexist banter or behaviour. The impact on pupils and their peers of that culture is at the very least **significant**. This is precisely the type of culture in which sexual harassment (and worse) can flourish, and hence the importance of tackling it head on.

*School Risk* – the School has in place a multitude of policies and educational strategies, the impact of which will be to reduce the risk of such a permissive culture. These include:

- All those pre-existing School measures listed above.
- The School's Behaviour, Rewards and Sanctions policy has been revised and deals expressly with requirements to be respectful and inclusive towards others and prohibits harmful sexual behaviours or any behaviour which is abusive, insulting or discriminatory vis-à-vis any protected characteristic such as sex or sexual orientation.
- The School's Acceptable Use of Computer Network by Pupils Policy and its Online Behaviours Policy.
- The education given in School to pupils on e-safety.
- The School's Relationship and Sex Education Policy.
- The School's Anti-Bullying Policy which highlights as examples of bullying many of the behaviours identified in the testimonies and interviews and makes clear the total unacceptability of any kind of bullying at Westminster.

- The School's Safeguarding Policy which directly addresses the issue of peer-on-peer sexual violence and sexual harassment and reinforces the fact that sexual harassment should never be passed off as "banter" or "part of growing up" and encourages incidents to be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Code of Conduct for staff, and General Regulations for students.

Based on the testimonies, interviews and surveys, it seems clear that whilst these various policies and their implementation in practice certainly mitigate this risk to some extent, I do not believe that the School risk is reduced significantly below the national level. I would rate the current risk of this type of culture in School as **likely**, and its impact as **significant**, meaning that the overall risk of a permissive culture in the School today is no less than **medium- high**.

*Future Risk* – The School ought to be able to do more about minimising the risk of a permissive culture of "normalisation" of sexist behaviours than it can in respect of students' underlying attitudes and beliefs or exposure to influences such as pornography and radicalisation. It is essential that the School seeks always to tackle such a culture. The shift to a culture where students are aware and empowered to challenge such behaviours is one of the strongest protective factors which the School could introduce. The recommendations as to the additional measures which the School should take in this respect are:

- The measures recommended above in respect of attitudes, beliefs and influences.
- A more consistently pronounced and then acted upon communication of the School's approach to tackling sexism, i.e. that it is completely unacceptable with education of the young people as to why this is the case, and why it is harmful for their development to exhibit such behaviours.
- Proactive steps by all staff to identify, address and prevent such incidents if and when they occur, and use them to learn lessons and reflect upon how practice can be improved more widely. The adoption of a wholesale punitive approach is likely to lead to a backlash. The carrot is always more effective than the stick in changing behaviours and attitudes. Young people have to recognise and take responsibility for their behaviours and recognise that these behaviours have a significant and deleterious impact on others. They cannot be excused.
- Greater focus within the Governing Body on these issues, building on the appointment of an Equality and Diversity Governor, and access to specialist training and advice both for the Education Committee and the full Governing Body in these issues.
- The introduction of a behavioural code of conduct for students (preferably with significant input from them – often called "co-production") which underlines expectations both as to behavioural standards and the duty of bystanders to intervene when they witness these standards being broken.
- Active bystander intervention training for students.
- The identification of named staff members (including but not limited to the DSL) whom students or their parents may approach with concerns about inappropriate peer

behaviour, whether more or less serious in nature. This may follow the sexual misconduct liaison officer model to which I refer later on.

- Provision of safeguarding training and relationship and sex education in the primary language of those receiving the training where that would aid their comprehension and understanding of the nuances of the materials for both staff and students.
- Obtaining an accurate understanding of RSE which pupils have received prior to joining the School, and where appropriate working with “feeder schools” to enhance their provision or ensure that the same messages are being provided.
- Creation of a committee of students made up of both sexes and those from the LGBTQ plus community who can discuss and drive some of the active bystander, code of conduct and curriculum initiatives mentioned above, including revisions to RSE. Empowering students is important, but it is important to recognise that children should not bear the burden of being responsible for policing behaviour which happens at school. Adults should recognise that the emotional burden upon some young women and men of having to manage or lead such initiatives can be significant and should take steps to ensure that the burden does not impact upon their emotional health.

Changing culture in any organisation is a slow process – often likened to turning around an oil tanker in the middle of the ocean; but it is achievable with energy, drive and commitment from governors, senior leaders and parents. The students at the School want this change, as do the staff, governors, and those parents to whom I spoke. The movements which have been put in train to raise awareness of sexist attitudes and approaches across our society, from schools to the workplace are hopefully beginning to take effect. Whilst such behaviours may have been accepted with resignation by those who are older, young people are clear in viewing them as unacceptable. There seems to be traction, or at the very least a great deal of discussion and debate about attitudes towards women and girls. Given this, it is possible for the School to reduce the risk of such a culture to **low medium**, both by reducing its likelihood and its impact.

## **Sexual harassment online**

*Endemic Risk* – The national research paints a depressingly bleak picture of the prevalence of sexual harassment online between children nationally. Based on that I would assess the endemic risk as **high** in that it seems both **very likely** and its likely impact on pupils affected **significant**.

*School Risk* – Once again, the School has a range of positive measures which will have an impact in reducing the risk of sexual harassment online to its pupils. These include:

- All of the measures listed above which the School already has in place with respect to other risks, including for example its Acceptable Use of Computer Network by Pupils and Online Behaviour Policies and online safety education given to pupils.
- Plans to extend online safety education currently offered to parents to help educate them on the issues to which their children are potentially going to be exposed to online.
- Ongoing monitoring of website access by the School’s IT Team.

- The School's existing IT firewalls and monitoring systems.

Based on testimonies, interviews and surveys, however, it seems clear that online sexual harassment remains a very serious risk for pupils, in spite of the policies and educational measures which the School has in place. Whilst the endemic risk is high, I would assess the School risk as **medium high** in that pupils remain **likely** to encounter it and its impact on them remains potentially **significant**.

*Future Risk* - The challenge for what is largely a day setting in understanding and managing pupil behaviours online is unquestionably difficult. The nature of online interactions means that it is intended to, and typically does, remain "underground" and not subject to School or parent scrutiny. School IT networks are rarely used, and most offending communications take place on personal devices and networks. Nevertheless, it is a challenge which the School must take on, and the recommendations in this respect are as follows:

- All of the recommendations listed above.
- A further review of the School's Online Behaviours Policy to incorporate learning from recent cases (within School and nationally).
- A review of current e-safety educational provision to pupils to include a focus on their own online conduct.
- Development of web-based tools and resources for pupils, parents and carers.
- The introduction of at least an annual social media awareness talk for parents and carers and resources for them to help navigate new platforms.
- Commission of an external organisation to deliver bespoke training for staff, students and parents.
- Provision of regular e-safety updates to students and parents as new applications and platforms evolve.
- Introduction of a student committee to inform policy and initiatives in the area of social media and internet use, which seeks not to be punitive but to provide "intelligence" as to what is being used for which purposes and how to manage such platforms sensibly and effectively given the risks. The School needs to provide information to parents about parental controls on phones and how steps can be taken to limit access to this material.

Realism of expectation is needed here, from both the School and parents, as to what can be achieved. Unless and until there is an effective system of age verification on websites, children and young people will be able to access damaging material. It is inevitable to some extent that adults will always be two steps (or more) behind children and young people which is why it is recommended the School harnesses 'pupil power' and initiatives to help shape its approach. The ambition must be to create a culture in which sexual harassment online is unacceptable and where it does occur, that pupils feel confident to call it out. To a large degree the most effective form of student online culture will be a self-policing one, and that is the chief reason why students must be instrumental in designing and driving change in this area. If that can happen, it is realistic to hope that the risk level of sexual harassment online could be reduced

from medium high to **medium**, by reducing its likelihood from likely to **possible**, and by reducing its impact (e.g. by increasing resilience and facilitating disclosures) from significant to **moderate**.

## **Sexual harassment out of school**

*Endemic Risk* – the national picture sadly illustrates that the risk of girls or members of the LGBTQ plus community being subject to sexual harassment out of school is **high**. These pupils are **very likely** to experience it in their lives outside of school, and its impact will be **significant**.

*School Risk* – the survey results, testimonies and interviews do not seem to indicate any lower level of this risk to pupils of the School than to pupils nationally. I would assess the School risk as **high**, on the same basis as the endemic risk in spite of those measures which the School currently has in place to combat it. In truth, the School has very few specific measures in place to combat sexual harassment out of school, aside from those policies, rules and practices already mentioned in respect of risks above. To the extent that there are any measures specifically in place to mitigate this risk, they are:

- The fact that the School's policies on Anti Bullying, Anti-Discrimination, Drugs, Online Behaviours and Safeguarding apply to pupils at all times whilst they are pupils.
- The fact that the School has taken steps when being made aware of incidents of sexual harassment which have occurred out of school.
- The facility, and encouragement of, pupils to come forward and report sexual harassment out of school wherever it has taken place, including the creation of a "call it out" email facility for pupils to use.

However, insofar as it is possible for any school to manage behaviour outside the school gates, the School's existing mitigation measures have proved to be relatively ineffective in reducing risk. The fact that so few pupils come forward to report such conduct when it occurs means that the School is only able to act in the small minority of cases where it is told of this.

Even then, being caught in a difficult situation in respect of their responsibilities to both pupils, and often with significant mental health issues also having to be recognised, and with inadequate guidance from the government or other statutory agencies until very recently, it can often be difficult to resolve matters satisfactorily to anyone. For those pupils minded to commit such acts, they currently therefore have an expectation of "getting away with it."

*Future Risk* – attitudes and beliefs need to be shaped more effectively by the School and a self-policing culture created whereby the pupils themselves challenge such behaviour when it is observed. This will take time. On top of that, the School needs to improve the percentage of pupils who feel confident enough to come forward and report instances of sexual harassment out of school when they occur. Accordingly, it is recommended that:

- The active bystander training which is recommended should explicitly deal with harassment outside of school and scenarios used to help pupils know how to intervene and how and when to report.

- Guidance and training should be provided to parents about parties and other social interactions out of school, and the standards which the School will expect to be applied by parents when holding events to which other pupils are invited.
- The inclusion in the parent contract of parental obligations to apply the School's expected standards when organising events outside of School for attendance by pupils and the provision of sanctions (up to requirement to withdraw their child) where these standards are breached so as to impact upon the good order of the School or the welfare of pupils.
- Consideration given to the appointment of sexual misconduct liaison officers. Such a model – which has been introduced in some universities in the UK – has been shown to increase the likelihood of young people coming forward to report concerns and seek help.
- Monitor and evaluate the School's recent review of its discipline and sanctions policy. As well as ensuring the most severe penalties are available for the most serious or repeated conduct, consideration should be given to the use of restorative justice in the School's approach – where appropriate and with the active informed consent of all parties – with opportunities for pupils who have committed less serious misconduct to “retrace” their steps and understand how they should have behaved instead, to provide education and awareness as well as punishment.

This is an exceptionally difficult challenge given that it relates to behaviour outside of the school day and geographical confines. However, the importance of tackling it lies in the fact that the vast majority of incidents of sexual harassment today occur out of school or online. If the School, in partnership with parents, cannot reduce the risk of sexual harassment occurring out of school, it will leave a serious and significant part of the problem not tackled. Ultimately, policing sexual harassment in school will achieve little if the culture pertains and the behaviour simply takes place out of school. If attitudes, culture, and the confidence to come forward and report incidents all change, it would be realistic to aim for a reduction of this risk from high to **medium**. This can be achieved if the mitigation measures proposed can reduce the likelihood of such conduct from very likely to **possible**, and the impact of such conduct where it occurs from significant to **moderate** (the latter of which can be achieved where the threshold for unacceptable behaviour is reduced, such that not only does the behaviour itself become less likely, but the nature of the behaviour where it does occur becomes less severe).

## **Sexual harassment in school**

*Endemic Risk* – the national picture as identified in various surveys including the most recent Ofsted report indicates that pupils nationally are **likely** to experience sexual harassment in school, whether physical or verbal. Whatever form the harassment takes its impact will be at least **significant**. This makes the endemic risk nationally for such conduct **medium high**.

*School Risk* – the School has a range of policies, rules, practices etc. which are designed to prevent, or at least deter, such conduct between pupils. All of these measures have already been listed in the context of sexual harassment online or out of school. Nevertheless, the testimonies, interviews and surveys conducted by this review show that this behaviour does

still sometimes occur in school, that in terms of likelihood it is probably **likely** and in terms of impact, its impact is **significant**, making the overall risk **medium high**.

*Future Risk* – More so than the risk of sexual harassment online or out of school, the risk of sexual harassment in school can be subject to the controls, sanctions and approaches of the school directly. All of the recommendations which have been made above in respect of sexual harassment online or out of school should equally apply to mitigate this particular risk. There are some additional recommendations to be made including:

- A “hot spot” mapping exercise to understand where the majority of complaints of harassment take place, and taking the necessary steps to prevent them<sup>2</sup>
- Bespoke staff and pupil training to help them to identify and intervene to stop and report behaviours.

If the cultural and educational changes can be implemented in respect of the other risks identified, then with these additional measures on top, it would be realistic for the School to reduce the likelihood of sexual harassment in School to **possible**, rather than likely, and by lowering the threshold of conduct which is unacceptable, also to reduce the impact from significant to **moderate**. This would result in a lower overall risk of **medium**.

## **Sexual violence online**

*Endemic Risk* – the categorisation used for sexual violence online is acts of a sexual nature occurring online and which would be capable of amounting to a prosecutable crime. Revenge porn, the taking and / or distribution of intimate images without consent (including up-skirting), the sending to the recipient of unsolicited indecent images or the taking and / or distribution of images of sexual assaults or other sexual violence would all be examples of conduct which I would include in this category. Reference to the national picture, and specifically the percentage of girls who are reporting receipt of unsolicited images of a sexual nature or who

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are feeling pressurised to provide images themselves and who complain of the sharing of those images without their consent, leads me to assess that endemic risk as **high**, in that it is **likely** to happen and its impact is potentially **severe**.

*School Risk* – there is no reason why the impact of this conduct on pupils in School where it happens will be any less than it is to pupils elsewhere, in other words potentially **severe**. Reviewing the survey results, testimonies and interviews, this risk is currently as likely to occur in School, (as it is clear that instances are occurring). On that basis . assessment of the current overall School risk is **medium high**. The existing measures which the School has in place to mitigate the risk of sexual violence online are the same as those which have been identified in the context of sexual harassment online.

*Future Risk* – the School has already taken the step since Easter 2021 of inviting a criminal barrister to speak to Sixth Form pupils about the criminal law and justice system in the context

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<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to the work of Professor Nan Stein of Wellesley College for the work she has undertaken in the US in this area and for agreeing to speak with me about this, along with academics working at Central Bedfordshire University.

of sexual violence (physical and online). It is hard to see how the School can reduce the impact of this risk but more needs to be done in order to drive down the likelihood of this sort of conduct occurring from possible to **unlikely**. To help achieve this the following specific recommendations which would sit on top of the other recommendations made above:

- Talks which set out both what are criminal offences and the likely sentences for such offending should be provided to all pupils as well as their parents. There should be engagement with the local safeguarding partnership to devise a programme or to buy in a programme devised by them – with the full support of the Metropolitan Police and agencies involved in these issues (such as CEOP) to provide advice, support and risk mitigation measures. It should also be explained to all pupils, and their parents, that the impact of such offending would and does have a significant impact upon their university career and their prospective employment.
- The School should consider bringing in coaching pupils on positive online behaviours. Successful examples of this exist in the higher education sector where students have volunteered to have their social media posts monitored and rewards given for positive social media use.
- The introduction of sexual misconduct liaison officers, or equivalent, who emphasise their wish to hear from any pupil who has experienced such conduct.

With the range of mitigation measures which it is a realistic aspiration on the School's part to make this risk **unlikely** in future.

## **Sexual Violence out of school**

*Endemic Risk* – On the basis that Ofsted's survey found that 79% of girls had experienced a sexual assault of some kind, it seems to me that the risk nationally of sexual violence out of school is **high**. It is either **likely** or **very likely** to happen and its impact is **severe**.

*School Risk* – The combination of the survey results along with the testimonies and interviews which I conducted, leads to the belief that the risk of sexual violence out of school far exceeds the same risk in school. The overwhelming majority of Westminster pupils describe themselves as feeling safe and happy when they are present at School, and where sexual violence has occurred most describe it as happening out of school. On that basis the assessment of the School risk of sexual violence out of school as currently no different from the endemic risk – in other words it is a **high** risk on the basis that it is either **likely** or **very likely** to happen and its impact is **severe**. The measures which the School currently has in place to combat this risk have already been covered above, and beyond those it is not clear if there is anything else in place specifically to target this particular risk.

*Future Risk* – As discussed in the context of sexual harassment out of school, the risk of sexual violence out of school is a particularly challenging one for any school to manage, because incidents when they occur are by definition off campus and out of the School's time. The School must nevertheless attempt to exert influence on and to collaborate with parents as regards their children's access to alcohol, drugs and money out of school and to ensure adequate supervision of parties and other social events. Recommendations are made above in relation to this. Beyond that, the only ways in which the School can hope to reduce this risk

are by achieving the cultural changes within its pupil body as referred to above, and by transforming the willingness of victims of sexual violence to come forward. To the recommendations above in respect of sexual harassment out of school, all of which are equally applicable here, are added:

- The School is proposing to introduce significant coverage of consent as part of its revised RSE across the age groups. From the interviews and testimonies, confusion, ignorance, misunderstanding, false assumptions or indifference around consent lies at the root of many of the incidents of sexual violence out of school which have occurred. There are many organisations with whom the School can work in developing this programme further.
- The School should explore the possibility of collaboration with a girls' school so that these issues can be discussed in a properly managed way by pre-Sixth Form boys from the School with their peers from girl schools. Subject to the comments below about coeducation, for so long as the School is single sex up to Sixth Form, it is essential that work is done with the younger boys to shape their attitudes, beliefs and culture before they reach the sixth form which by necessity involves understanding what their female peers think and feel.
- The School should collaborate with its local authority to develop a protocol which can be shared with pupils, so they can better understand the circumstances in which disclosures need to be referred to children's services and the Police and the protections which are built into the system to protect victims. It is apparent that the fear of setting off a "runaway train" which could result in police investigations and criminal trials contrary to the victim's wishes is clearly a factor inhibiting the reporting of incidents. If some of pupils' worst fears can be debunked and if they can be reassured that their voice and wishes will generally be respected and listened to by statutory agencies, that could go some way to addressing their reluctance to report incidents.

Given that the assessment of school risk of sexual violence out of school is high, the School has to attempt to bring this level of risk down. Whilst it cannot reduce the impact of the risk where it occurs, it can seek to reduce its likelihood. It is to be hoped that, by implementing the various recommendations in this report, it is realistic for the School to reduce likelihood from likely or very likely to **possible**, and on that basis to reduce the overall level of risk from high to **medium high**.

## **Sexual Violence in School**

*Endemic Risk* – There are very few statistics nationally which show the scale of sexual violence – by which I mean criminal offending such as sexual assault, which is occurring in schools, as distinct from out of schools. By definition the risk is likely be lower in school than out of school, merely because of the presence (on the whole) of adult supervision and the relative lack of opportunity to offend in school compared with out of school. (This does not mean that such incidents have not and could not occur on the school site. Supervision, in particular of certain spaces outside the classroom can be limited for older pupils: and the physical environment of a school always presents multiple places where sexual offending can occur. Westminster has a particular challenge given that it is based upon a spread-out geographic site and many of

the buildings have “nooks and crannies”). On that basis the endemic risk as being **medium high**, based on a likelihood of **possible** and potential impact of **severe**.

*School Risk* – Based on the survey answers and the testimonies and interviews, I would assess the risk of sexual violence in School as being **unlikely** but with a **severe** impact where it occurs. That produces an overall risk level of **medium high**. The measures which the School has in place to tackle other sexual violence and harassment do currently have a positive impact in making school a place where the most pupils feel safe.

*Future Risk* – Given the potential severity of impact, it is unfortunate but realistic to recognise that it is not practicable for the School to reduce the risk level of sexual violence in school below **medium**, and in order to achieve that it will need to attempt to reduce likelihood from unlikely to **very unlikely**. In view of the national picture described above that will undoubtedly be a challenge, but it is of course one which the School should take on. No workplace or other learning environment would regard it acceptable to have a risk of sexual violence above the level of very unlikely, and no school should find it acceptable either.

All of the recommendations made above should contribute to the reduction of the risk of sexual violence in school, and if all of them are followed and properly implemented a reduction in the risk of sexual violence in school should naturally flow from the reduction in other risks lower down the pyramid. To those recommendations the following are added to address this specific risk:

- A review of current rules around boarding accommodation and access by pupils of the same or other sex to each other’s rooms. I do not advocate a particular course of action here, and a balance needs to be struck between averting risk and allowing normal social development to occur. However, the girls’ concerns that the current rules are anachronistic and potentially discriminatory should be considered.
- A review of supervision levels around the School campus, in line with the outcome of the hotspot mapping exercise recommended above. Every school site has areas less visited by adults, and the School should eliminate these where they exist.

## **Further Steps**

There are some other steps which it is recommended could be taken by the School to assist in the mitigation of risks. These include:

- Ensuring that moral and personal development is celebrated, recognised, and rewarded as much as academic success.
- A rigorous evaluation whether scholarships, sporting opportunities, traditions and rituals treat young men and women differently for reasons which reinforce gender inequality or reinforce gendered norms. Where these do, they should be abandoned or reformed. The nomenclature for the senior leadership team is an obvious example where gender neutrality of job title could be of assistance.
- The School should evaluate whether the choice of statues, pictures and house-names is reflective of a gender balanced and inclusive school.

- The School should acknowledge that it has missed opportunities to learn in the past, and consider what steps it should take to seek to recognise those missed opportunities and what that may have cost young people.
- The School's website should be updated to ensure that equal coverage is given to female and male pupils.
- Consideration should be given to the form of assessment and feedback – excessive emphasis on exam success can be at the expense of development of the whole pupil.

## **F: Conclusion**

The aim in using a methodical risk-based approach to assessing and mitigating the risks of sexual violence and harassment in school is to provide the School with a clear and consistent roadmap going forwards. All schools are experienced in the use of risk assessments – they are used all of the time in educational settings.

The School therefore now has an opportunity to map the range of risks which it and its pupils face in respect of sexual violence and harassment by peers, and comprehensively to plan, risk by risk, how it will seek to mitigate them. The aspiration is that this review will provide the School with a clear framework in which to do just that.

A risk register, mapping identified risks and setting out mitigating measures to reduce each risk, will also prove a valuable governance tool for the Governing Body of the School. The Governing Body can play a valuable non-executive role in the oversight of risk and risk management. The senior leadership of the School is tasked with the job of safeguarding pupils, and the use of a risk register of safeguarding risks, accompanied by the measures in place to mitigate those risks, is an effective means of providing the Governing Body with visibility, and enabling it to challenge and hold the senior management to account.

It is not the role of this review to tell the School how it should run itself and whom it should teach. Nor can a question as important as moving towards full co-education be dictated by a negative – such as the avoidance of the risks which this report identifies. There are many potential positives (and some potential drawbacks) to such a move, and it is those issues which should shape any debate at Westminster School around this topic.

During the review it has become clear that the School's Governing Body and Head Master are already considering a move to full co-education for a range of positive educational and pastoral reasons. From a more limited brief and perspective I would be wholly supportive of such a move. The challenge posed by running a school for boys up to the age of 16 which transforms itself in its Sixth Form into a co-educational school with a minority of girls is unquestionably a major one, and without change may make achieving the sort of cultural change which is being recommended that much harder.

However, if the School were to make the move to fully co-educational that would present a perfect opportunity within which to achieve the wholesale cultural change which this report recommends.

## **Annexure 1 – Methodology**

- 1.1 The reviewers were commissioned to provide a review of the school's culture and ethos and how aspects of its structure, organisation and practices could have fed into a culture of sexism, harassment and sexual violence primarily against female students as disclosed by the Everyone's Invited testimonies, but also against the LGBTQ plus community of students at the School. The review was confined to the Great School, although senior staff of the Under School were interviewed. Recommendations were to be made as to how the School could make changes if such were seen to be necessary.
- 1.2 The research comprised seven main sources of data encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data:
  - 1.2.1 The testimonies posted on Everyone's Invited and testimonies from other contacts and sources (135 testimonies in total).
  - 1.2.2 A number of 1:1 and small group focus groups were arranged with current students at the School, numbering 78 who were interviewed. Other students contributed in writing.
  - 1.2.3 A number of interviews with present and former staff and present and former governors (98 people were interviewed in total).
  - 1.2.4 A number of interviews with former students, parents of students (past and present) – (interviews with or material gathered from around 40 people).
  - 1.2.5 A review of the School's records including Governing Body minutes, student files, behaviour logs, safeguarding files, referrals to the LADO and staff disciplinary files (over 200 files were examined).
  - 1.2.6 A survey of the young people undertaken by external researchers (272 young people at the Great School responded to the survey).
  - 1.2.7 Reviewers also assessed national guidance in force at the time in question and the current and past policies and procedures of the School from 2004 onwards (the date was chosen as when more standardised regulation by the state occurred in the independent school sector).
- 1.3 I adopted this mixed methodology as I was not tasked with uncovering 'the truth' but to understand the likely extent of harmful sexual behaviour and sexism both past and present. Ultimately, our aim was to identify issues, and from those identify those that were unique to Westminster, as well as those which were within Westminster's power

to change. Like any methodology, this has limits. Specifically, it was not feasible to interview every present or past student, so our report is not a “record” of what has occurred. Similarly, the majority of our respondents were self-selecting and that will have skewed our data since those who contributed were already those most engaged with the issues. I have endeavoured to compensate for that by placing all evidence

in context; nevertheless, I have placed great weight on the testimonies and interviews.

- 1.4 I was provided with 135 testimonies received from a variety of sources. It was not possible to date most of these testimonies, but from the language used many of them relate to incidents which have taken place in the past decade. I did receive some correspondence regarding non-recent abuse by staff which was identifiable by date.
- 1.5 When examining the material, it was important to place it in context. The young people were interviewed after they had taken their “exams”: they had just emerged from an eighteen-month period of interrupted schooling, isolation at home (or in school), an unusual “examination” series as part of the COVID-19-related Teacher Assessed Grades, and having to deal with all the uncertainties and anxieties that accompanied the pandemic more generally. The lives of young people were particularly disrupted by the events of 2020 and 2021, and the material must be seen in this context, particularly when it comes to their mental health and wellbeing.
- 1.6 The reviewers undertook discussions with the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey who have a governance and pastoral relationship with the school. They also discussed the issues relating to the terms of reference with statutory agencies involved in dealing with sexual violence or with providing advice and guidance to schools, including the police, central and local government, and inspectorates: discussions with independent school organisations: discussions with specialist academics and others working on issues of sexual violence and gender equality in schools including charities and NGO’s. A total of 26 people were spoken with from diverse organisations.
- 1.7 I also spoke with senior leaders at Westminster Under School and at Harris Westminster Sixth Form Academy.
- 1.8 The reviewers did not compel any person to provide evidence or information to this review.
- 1.9 The reviewers wish to thank everyone who spoke with them and provided them with information. Particular thanks must go to the Archivist, Elizabeth Wells; Richard Hindley, Head of IT at Westminster School; the Designated Safeguarding Lead, James Kazi; and Jasmin Radanovic, who provided us with administrative support during the course of the review.

## **Annexure 2 – The National Picture**

- 1.1 In order to understand the ethos and culture of Westminster School, it is essential to understand the society in which Westminster is situated and the impact that different

influences in that society have upon the lives of young people. Whilst those educated at Westminster School have exceptional academic abilities, this does not make them immune from the society around them, nor radically different to other teenagers in how they live their lives. In fact, our findings show that those attending Westminster have the same range of views, are under the same social pressures, and have the same concerns and experiences as the teenagers interviewed or examined in other research about broader societal features which may play into misogyny, sexual harassment and violence.

## **Sexually harmful behaviour in school**

2.1 There is currently no centralised data collection of sexual harassment and violence in schools. Moreover, it is estimated that there is a high level of under-reporting of that which exists, as young people either do not report it or it is not consistently reported on to the police or other external bodies.

2.2 The testimonies from Everyone's Invited present a picture of sexist behaviours and sexual violence in over 2,000 schools. The NSPCC, which is running a helpline to report abuse in education, has received 721 contacts over six months.<sup>3</sup> But this is not the first time that these issues have been raised.

2.3 The Women and Equalities Committee of the Houses of Parliament reported on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools in September and November 2016.<sup>4</sup> It reported that these issues were a "significant issue" in schools and needed to be urgently tackled.<sup>5</sup>

2.4 The NEU Study run with UK Feminista in 2017, on Sexism in Schools, is called "It's just everywhere".<sup>6</sup> The statistics gathered in that survey identified that:

2.4.1 66% of female students and 37% of male students in mixed-sex sixth forms experience or witness the use of sexist language in schools.

2.4.2 36% of female students in mixed sex secondary schools say they have personally been treated differently on account of their gender, compared to 15% of male students.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2021/report-abuse-education-helpline>

<sup>4</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/9102.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Women and Equalities Committee report September 2015, paragraph 1 and 3 of conclusions and recommendations.

<sup>6</sup> Study findings are summarised at <https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/sexual-harassment-girlswidespread-schools>

2.4.3 Over a third of female students at mixed sex schools in this survey personally experienced some form of sexual harassment and 24% had been subject to unwanted touching of a sexual nature while at school.

2.4.4 Almost one in three teachers in mixed sex secondary schools witnessed sexual harassment in their school on at least a weekly basis. A further 36% say they witnessed it on a termly basis.

2.4.5 25% of all secondary school teachers say that they witnessed gender stereotyping and discrimination on a daily basis, and a further quarter say that they witness it on a weekly basis.

2.5 Similar survey results over the past twenty years reach similar conclusions - for example a 2010 survey by End Violence against Women and Girls found that three quarters of young people had heard young women called “slut “ or “slag” recently<sup>7</sup> Academics working in this area<sup>8</sup> identify that such harassment is “normalised”, and some forms of sexual harassment, including rape, are seen as inevitable, or the responsibility of the young woman if they are seen to have behaved “inappropriately” in relation to a male friend, or partner. This is not a new phenomenon: research published in 2020 based upon the experience of teenage girls from 1950 until 1980 showed numerous testimonies of sexual harassment, abuse, coercions, assault and rape which were committed by fellow young people and occurred within existing intimate relationships.<sup>9</sup>

2.6 The Ofsted report of June 2021 found that nearly 90% of girls and 50% of boys, or identified peers, had been sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see either “a lot”, or “sometimes”. 92% of girls and 74% of boys said sexist name calling happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers. The frequency of these behaviours meant that they were considered to be normal.<sup>10</sup>

2.7 Girlguiding UK, the largest female only youth organisation in the country, undertakes an annual survey. Its 2021 research briefing found that 67% of girls and young women aged 13-18 surveyed had experienced sexual harassment from another student and

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<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 13 from <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/9102.htm> which is a citation from the End Violence against Women and Girls survey 2010.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the evidence provided in writing by Professor Vanita Sundaram, the University of York to the Women and Equalities Committee at para 6: Carlene Firmin “School Rules of (sexual) engagement: government, staff and student contributions to the norms of peer sexual -abuse in seven UK schools – Journal of Sexual Aggression 26, No 3 [2020] 289 – 301.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Dr Hannah Charnock , University of Bristol, June 2021 with the reviewers and her research [at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/teenage-sexual-violence/>] Hannah Charnock “Teenage girls, female friendship and the making of the “sexual revolution” in England c 1950 – 1980. Historical Journal 63, No 4 [2020] 1032 – 53.

<sup>10</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-ofsexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-ofsexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges)

29% first experienced this between the ages of 11-13.<sup>11</sup> BBC Panorama reported figures of 15,000-16,000 reports to police of sexually harmful behaviour between

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children and young people from 2018/19 (in response to Freedom of Information Reports): which did not include the non-consensual sharing of sexual images.<sup>12</sup>

2.8 The police recorded 73,260 sexual offences against children in March 2019, and around a quarter of these involved rape (and may be a significant underestimate on the basis of the under-reporting observation made earlier).<sup>13</sup> 51.9% of female victims of sexual violence were aged between 5-19 in police crime data for the year ending March 2020.<sup>14</sup> Females aged 10-24 were disproportionately more likely to be the victim of sexual offences recorded by the police (so 24.1% of the crimes records were in this age group compared to 5.7% of the population).<sup>15</sup> The Crime Survey for England and Wales (which is helpful because it seeks to identify crimes not reported to the police as well as those reported) for the period 2018-2020 identified that men and women aged 16-24 years were more likely to be the victims of sexual assault than those over 25.<sup>14</sup> Of the prevalence of sexual assault amongst the population, the crime survey suggests that for those aged 16-19, 12.9% of women in that age bracket would have been the victim of some form of sexual assault, and 2.9% of men.<sup>15</sup> Full time students were more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year than people in any other occupation type (not surprising given that the majority of those aged 16-25 are in education).

2.9 Online grooming, according to figures from the NSPCC (based upon figures where gender and age were recorded) shows a 60% increase in the number of sexual communications with a child offence recorded by the police<sup>16</sup> since 2017. Girls are more likely to be targeted – being the victim of 83% of grooming cases where the gender was known.

2.10 This is also not a phenomenon confined to England and Wales. Research from Europe<sup>17</sup> and the United States<sup>20</sup> identifies similar problems.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/girls-making-change/our-research/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58332341>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy-launched>  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datalist?filter=datasets> <sup>14</sup>  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>

<sup>15</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/sexualoffencesvictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/march2020>

<sup>14</sup> ibid

<sup>15</sup> ibid

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2021/online-grooming-crimes-girls>

<sup>17</sup> Written submission from the Addressing Sexual Bullying Across Europe ABSAE Project <sup>20</sup>

Interview with Dr Nan Stein, Wellesley College, who has undertaken work in this area for over 20 years, and provided training, guidance and support to US schools.

## Sexual offending and sexual violence against women and girls in our society

3.1 The government has, in 2021, published a National Strategy to eradicate violence against women and girls.<sup>18</sup> This is a reflection of what Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) in September 2021 – an organisation not known to favour hyperbole – described as “an epidemic of violent and abusive offending against

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women and girls in England and Wales.”<sup>19</sup> The problem is described in the HMIC report as consistent and deep rooted and growing in the form it takes.

3.2 The strategy of the Home Office reflects the need to tackle the misogyny out of which sexual violence springs – committing funding to awareness of and focus upon harmful misogynistic attitudes. The National Strategy recognises that sexual harassment in public places is “all too common”. The young women we spoke to referred to sexual harassment on public transport and going to and from school.

3.3 A large-scale study in the EU in 2013 of 42,000 women Found that up to 21% of them had experienced sexual harassment in the preceding 12 months,<sup>20</sup> with estimates in the UK higher at 25%. This is likely to be an underestimate as many women see sexual harassment as so “normalised” that they do not choose to call these incidents “sexual harassment.”<sup>21</sup> Women often do not label their experiences as sexual violence because they worry about the impact this may have upon professional standing, ability to get work, their relationships and personal reputation.<sup>22</sup> The Crime Survey for England and Wales of March 2020 estimated that 2.9% of women (618,000) and 0.7% of men (155,000) experienced sexual assault in 2019-2020. The most common form of sexual assault was sexual touching.<sup>26</sup>

3.4 Sexual violence and assault are widespread and largely take place between people who know each other in the case of crimes against women. The Crime Survey for England and Wales of March 2020 estimated that 1.6 million adults (16-74) had experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16.<sup>23</sup> More than 4 in ten of them were victimised by their partner or ex-partner. Nearly one in ten were victimised in a “public space” but over one third in their own home: fewer than

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy-launched>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publication-html/police-response-to-violence-against-women-and-girls-final-inspection-report/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

<sup>21</sup> Lazard, Lisa (2009) Deconstructing Sexual Harassment: An analysis of constructions of unwanted sexual attention and (Un)resistance in Participant and Policy Accounts: PhD thesis, University of Northampton, cited found on <http://oro.open.ac.uk/51701/3/Deconstructing%2520Sexual%2520Harassment%2520Thesis%2520Lazard.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.open.ac.uk/research/news/false-accusations-sexual-violence>, written by Lisa Lazar, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, The Open University.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/sexualoffencesvictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/march2020>

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

one in six reported this to the police because of embarrassment or humiliation or taking the view that nothing would be done. This amounts to one in 20 women experiencing rape since 16, and 4.8% of all women experiencing assault by penetration. 0.5% of men experienced rape.

- 3.5 The vast majority of sexual violence is perpetrated by men against other women or men. The Crime Survey statistics of 2020 identify that 98% of perpetrators of rape were men. Almost two thirds reported that it was a man aged between 20-39, with most victims reporting being assaulted by a male of a similar age to themselves.<sup>24</sup>

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Most women who were raped or subject to assault by penetration were either in a relationship with the perpetrator (44%) or knew them (37%), including friends (12%) or dates (10%). Of all sexual offences reported to the police in 2019-2020, the victim was female in 84% of cases.<sup>29</sup>

- 3.6 The rape review report of June 2021<sup>30</sup> paints a bleak picture of the ability of the criminal justice system successfully to charge and prosecute people for the crime of rape. It identifies that there are an estimated 128,000 victims of rape in England and Wales in a Year: less than 20% of victims report this to the police – and only 1.6% of rapes which are reported lead to a charge<sup>31</sup> The very low number of prosecutions<sup>32</sup> can lead young people to consider that nothing will be done and there will be no justice even if a report is made. The HMIC report of September 2021 identified that whilst there had been improvements in dealing with offences of violence against women and girls, there was still much to be done. In particular, there was inconsistency or response and inconsistency in safeguarding arrangements for local partnerships (something which is particularly relevant for schools). The HMIC suggests the need for a clearer focus, better funding, and a clear sense that this is a national policing priority – but that there needs to be collaborative working between the police and housing, and education (and other public bodies) to improve prevention and victim support.<sup>33</sup>

- 3.7 Alongside this must be a recognition and the dispelling of the myth that women lie about rape or make false allegations. That is simply not true. Research from the Home Office suggests that around 3% of rape allegations may be false – which means that 97% are true.<sup>34</sup> The CPS reported in 2013 that there is one prosecution for false rape out of every 161 cases prosecuted – so only 0.62% of all rape cases. An almost absurd statistic produced by Channel 4 in 2018 examining relevant Office for National Statistics and Crime Survey Data suggests that men have a 0.000021281 percentage chance of being falsely accused of rape (based upon 35 prosecutions for false allegations in 2011 compared to 16.5 million men aged 16-59 living in England and Wales at the time).<sup>35</sup>

- 3.8 There is a need to recognise that men are also subject to sexual violence, albeit that the numbers reported are significantly fewer than for women and girls. The Crime Survey report from 2020 (as set out above) estimates that the most likely time for

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1001417/end-to-end-rape-review-report-with-correction-slip.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1001417/end-to-end-rape-review-report-with-correction-slip.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Set out in p3 of the End to End rape review, footnote 4 combined data 2017-20 from ONS statistics for sexual offences.

<sup>32</sup> Prosecutions have significantly fallen since 2016.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publication-html/police-response-to-violence-against-women-and-girls-final-inspection-report>

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/legal\\_guidance/perverting-course-of-justicemarch-2013.pdf](https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/legal_guidance/perverting-course-of-justicemarch-2013.pdf)

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238713283\\_Home\\_Office\\_Research\\_Study\\_293\\_A\\_gap\\_or\\_a\\_chasm\\_Attrition\\_in\\_reported\\_rape\\_cases](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238713283_Home_Office_Research_Study_293_A_gap_or_a_chasm_Attrition_in_reported_rape_cases)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-men-are-more-likely-to-be-raped-than-befalsely-accused-of-rape>

men to be sexually assaulted is between 16-25, with 2.9% of men having experienced some form of sexual assault of those aged 16-74 for the years 2018-2020. Males aged 5-19 were disproportionately more likely to be the victims of sexual offences – so whilst 6.2% of the male population were aged 10-14, this age group accounted for 29.5% of all police recorded sexual offences. More than half of all recorded sexual offences against men were for those aged under 15 years.<sup>36</sup>

3.9 The police also record crime incidents as to whether they were influenced by someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity – known as “hate crimes”.<sup>25</sup> These are not just sexual offences, but any common type of crime against people or householders. The data shows a significant reduction in hate crime recorded incidents against those who were lesbian, gay and bisexual over the past ten years from 69,000 incidents in 2007-2009 to 23,000 in 2018-2020. Hate crime statistics based upon someone’s gender identity have only been separately recorded from 2018 onwards and amounted to 7,000 incidents 2018-2020. Most of those subject to hate crime are more likely to involve the threat of violence or actual violence against someone. They were more likely to be impacted socially or psychologically following this crime.

## Pornography

4.1 Pornography has always existed. However, our society, through the use of smart phones and the internet, has made pornographic material available to young people free, around the clock, able to be viewed privately and with total anonymity. Pornhub, a major provider of pornographic material in the UK estimates that 75% of its videos are accessed via mobile subscription<sup>26</sup>.

4.2 It is important to recognise that the pornography viewed by young people today is radically different to the “top shelf” magazines which would have been commonly available to their parents and grandparents as “pornography” prior to the arrival of the internet. Researchers identify that “*mainstream commercial pornography has coalesced around a relatively homogenous script involving violence and female degradation*”.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Statistics and research best summarised in parliamentary research briefing published December 2020 into hate crime <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8537/CBP-8537.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Cited in literature review of the Equalities Office cited as “Pornhub – 10 years of Pleasure” (2017).

<sup>39</sup> Sun et al (2014) p1, cited in the Equalities Office literature review of 2020 p14.

Research from 2010 found that 88% of all material reviewed by them involved physical aggression by men on women<sup>27</sup>. Whilst pornographic sites are not meant to host “*extreme pornography*” (which is illegal)<sup>41</sup>, research shows that it can be available on these sites<sup>28</sup>. In December 2020, Pornhub removed millions of videos

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/sexualoffencesvictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/march2020>

from its website after a New York Times investigation<sup>29</sup> found that a number of them featured indecent images of children<sup>30</sup> or individuals who had been the subject of sex trafficking.<sup>31</sup> Violence perpetrated in pornographic material, provided it does not involve assault by penetration, serious injury or death, and does not involve children is not illegal.

4.3 A study by the BBFC published in 2019<sup>32</sup> in the UK identifies that over 51% of 11-13 years old reported that they had seen pornography at some point, rising to 66% of 14-15 year-olds. The NPCC (National Police Chiefs Council) consider that the average age at which boys begin to watch such material is 11.<sup>33</sup> The majority of firsttime viewing was “accidental”, with children feeling both “grossed out” and “confused”, particularly those who had seen it under the age of ten.

4.4 Other studies suggest that watching pornography may have an influence as to the type and nature of sex then engaged in or viewed as acceptable – with the BBFC report of 2019 finding that 41% of young people who knew about it agreeing that watching it made people less respectful of the opposite sex. Girls, in particular, spoke of their fear that the aggressive depictions of sex would be seen as “normal” by young male viewers of pornography and so copied in real life sexual encounters. The UK Office of the Children’s Commissioner interviewed young male students in 2013 and found that pornography was being used by these young men for information and education.<sup>34</sup> Research published by the Government Equalities Office in February

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<sup>27</sup> Bridges et al (2010) p1065 cited in the Equalities Office research published 2020, p15. <sup>41</sup> This definition is if the material is “grossly offensive, disgusting and otherwise obscene,” and depicts acts involving necrophilia, bestiality, non-consensual penetrative sex, or sex which results in serious injury or death as defined under s63 of the Criminal Justice Act 2008 and s37 of the Crime and Courts Act 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Equalities Office literature review, p15, citing McGlynn C and Vera-Grey F (2019) “Porn website T and C’s are works of fiction. We need radical measures to take them on – Huffington Post (online).

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/09/opinion/pornhub-news-child-abuse.html>

<sup>30</sup> Frequently said to be “child pornography” but survivors of such abuse consider that to call it pornography is to associate it with legal or pleasurable material: the criminal justice system calls it indecent images of children.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/dec/14/pornhub-purge-removes-unverified-videosinvestigation-child-abuse>

<sup>32</sup> British Board of Film Classification: <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-us/news/children-see-pornography-as-young-as-seven-new-report-finds>

<sup>33</sup> Discussion with Simon Bailey, former lead for the NPCC on sexual abuse against children with the reviewers, May 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Maddy Coy, Liz Kelly, Fiona Elvines, Maria Garner and Ava Kanyeredzi “Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape”: How young people in England understand sexual consent: Office of the

2020 examined the relationship between pornography use and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours.<sup>49</sup> Whilst it is not possible to establish a direct causal link between such usage and attitudes as this would involve unethical study conditions,<sup>35</sup> the findings of the research study showed “substantial” evidence of an association between the use of pornography and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours

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towards women. The relationship does exist and is seen as “*especially true for violent pornography*”.<sup>36</sup>

4.5 The literature review of 2020<sup>37</sup> identified four key themes of harmful sexual attitudes associated with the use of pornography:

4.5.1 Viewing women as sex objects: Pornography desensitises men, so they learn to see women as sex objects. It can breed a lack of empathy towards women as sexual aggression is completely normalised in pornographic films. Women in these films are seen to be “enjoying” the degradation, thus reassuring the viewer that it is acceptable to watch the abuse of video, or training men to misinterpret real life signs from women.

4.5.2 Shaping men’s sexual expectation of women. Pornography is used to learn sexual behaviours. Its use has been associated with increasing men’s expectations of “porn like sex” – especially amongst young people and shaping unrealistic expectations of what women want to do sexually.

4.5.3 Acceptance of sexual aggression towards women. There is a statistical correlation between viewing of pornography (especially violent pornography) and attitudes which support violence against women, and hostile sexism.

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Children’s Commissioner <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/sex-without-consent-is-suppose-that-is> rape.

<sup>49</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/976730/The\\_Relationship\\_between\\_Pornography\\_use\\_and\\_Harmful\\_Sexual\\_Attitudes\\_and\\_Behaviour\\_s- literature\\_review\\_v1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/976730/The_Relationship_between_Pornography_use_and_Harmful_Sexual_Attitudes_and_Behaviour_s- literature_review_v1.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Making people watch pornography in order to observe their potentially harmful behaviour in the future.

<sup>36</sup> p6:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/976730/The\\_Relationship\\_between\\_Pornography\\_use\\_and\\_Harmful\\_Sexual\\_Attitudes\\_and\\_Behaviour\\_s- literature\\_review\\_v1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/976730/The_Relationship_between_Pornography_use_and_Harmful_Sexual_Attitudes_and_Behaviour_s- literature_review_v1.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid footnote p8: the literature review provides footnotes to the relevant academic literature.

4.5.4 Perpetration of sexual aggression. Use is associated with increased likelihood of committing both verbal and physical acts of sexual aggression, and a reduced willingness to intervene in a potential act of sexual violence.

4.6 To give an example, Laura Bates, the founder of Everyday Sexism and speaker in schools provides examples in her recent book about the “manosphere”<sup>38</sup> of what young people have said to her which may well have been influenced by such pornographic material being so freely available. She describes young people saying that “*rape is a compliment really*”, and “*crying is part of foreplay*.”

4.7 The BBFC report<sup>39</sup> from 2019 also found that there was a discrepancy between the views of parents and what children were actually experiencing. 75% of parents felt that their child would not have seen pornography online. But of their children, more than half said that they had seen it. The education of parents as to the reality of what their children are watching is essential.

## The online world and the smartphone

5.1 The young people at Westminster, like all other children in the United Kingdom, have almost unlimited access to the internet and use the online world interchangeably with the offline world. They have grown up using devices. Recent survey results estimate that 9 in 10 children went online every day:<sup>55</sup> More than three quarters of children spend three or more hours online a day at the weekend, with one in five spending seven or more hours a day online at the weekend. Almost half of the children spent three or more hours online on an ordinary school day.<sup>40</sup> Use of video sharing platforms was nearly universal according to an Ofcom study into children’s media habits in 2020-2021<sup>41</sup>, with seven in ten 5-15 year-olds playing games online in 2020. Boys were more likely than girls to use gaming to connect with their friends. 87% of all 12-15 year-olds used social media sites or apps (such as Instagram, Snapchat).<sup>42</sup> Ofcom data suggests that 91% of 11-15-year-olds have their own smartphone.<sup>43</sup> 95% of 16-24 year-olds also have one.

5.2 This has a pronounced influence on many aspects of the lives of all young people:

5.2.1 Exposing young people to extremist views without any counterbalance and using algorithms to suggest viewing which may become more and more extreme.

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<sup>38</sup> Men who hate women: Simon and Schuster 2020, p271.

<sup>39</sup> The research is only available on request because of its graphic nature.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-useand-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-useand-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p8 footnote 51

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-useand-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-useand-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf)

- 5.2.2 By using social media sites at which “likes” or “shares” are seen as positive attributes, it can play into negative attitudes by young people as to their self-image and their body image. It can also perpetrate stereotypical or monocultural ideas of beauty and attractiveness. Press reports suggest that social media organisations have research or data which suggests the pernicious influence that their platforms have upon the mental health of young people.<sup>44</sup>
- 5.2.3 By creating space for bullying to take place via encrypted chat channels, which can then be disguised from adults or others with oversight.
- 5.2.4 By creating encrypted channels where memes, gifs, jokes and “banter” can be easily and widely shared which is sexist and misogynistic, or which praises sexual harassment and violence.
- 5.2.5 Photographs can be instantly asked for and taken and young people are used to documenting every aspect of their lives and watching every aspect of other people’s lives being documented via social media. This quite naturally extends to the sharing of explicit images. Ofsted in its rapid review provided statistics that 90% of the girls interviewed and nearly 50% of the

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/childrenonlinebehaviourinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020>

boys were sent explicit pictures or videos of things they “did not want to see happen a lot or sometimes” to them or their peers.<sup>45</sup>

- 5.2.6 Aggressive trolling, in particular of women, also encourages a coarsening of language and discourse. It is frequent on social media sites for prominent women to be threatened with rape or physical injury. It would be foolish to expect that this coarsening of public debate and growth of threats of violence would not trickle down into the lives of teenagers.

## Mental Health

- 6.1 There is increasing understanding of the need for schools to be places where some form of mental health provision and outreach takes place. The government has issued guidance in 2021<sup>46</sup>, supporting guidance issued by Public Health England<sup>63</sup>. The proposal by the government is to “embed” a culture of “openness” around mental health provision in schools and forge stronger links between education and health services to ensure children and young people can access appropriate support. This includes providing training for school staff (in the state sector) to be “mental health

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<sup>44</sup> Guardian, 15 September 2021 – Instagram knows that social media harms teenagers.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges>

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1020249/Promoting\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_s\\_mental\\_health\\_and\\_wellbeing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020249/Promoting_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_and_wellbeing.pdf)

leads”: funding mental health support team in schools supported by clinical staff to provide early intervention and ongoing help: lessening waiting times for specialist mental health services for young people – provided by the NHS by CAMHS – the child and adolescent mental health service. There are also specific programmes (the Link recovery programme) supported by the Department for Education aimed at improving the mental health of young people following the coronavirus pandemic.

6.2 The reason for this is because surveys show increasing levels of probable mental health disorders in young people. The Mental Health of Children in Young People in England Survey (2020)<sup>47</sup> found that one in six children aged 5-16 were identified as having such a disorder, an increase from one in nine in 2017. Of older teenagers, 27.2% of young women aged 17-22 had a probable mental health disorder and 13.3% of young men had a probable mental health disorder. The Covid 19 surveillance report<sup>48</sup> identifies that females and those with pre-existing mental health issues had more significant problems than others. Those with SEN also were more anxious and unhappy. Statistics from 2015 suggest that 70% of children and young people have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age.<sup>49</sup> Women are more than twice as likely to have a common mental health problem and almost twice as likely to

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be diagnosed with anxiety disorders.<sup>67</sup> Many of these problems emerge during adolescence. The Public Health England guidance<sup>50</sup> identifies that in an average class of 30 children at the age of 15 – 5 could have a mental disorder, 10 will have experienced parental separation, 7 are likely to have been bullied and 6 may be selfharming.

6.3 An eating disorders charity estimates that around 1.25 million people in the UK have an eating disorder.<sup>51</sup>

## Drugs and alcohol

7.1 Many of the testimonies reported that sexual harassment and violence occurred at parties, where alcohol and/or drugs were present and had been taken. Surveys undertaken by the NHS on smoking, drinking and drug use for school aged pupils<sup>52</sup> published in August 2019<sup>71</sup> (largely dealing with young people from 11-16) suggests that 24% of pupils had at some stage taken drugs: that this ranged from 9% of 11 year olds to

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<sup>47</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillancereport>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/fundamental-facts-15.pdf>

Children’s Society (2008) The Good Childhood Inquiry: health research evidence. London: Children’s Society.

<sup>50</sup> Promoting children and young people’s emotional health and wellbeing, republished March 2021 (Public Health England).

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/about-eating-disorders/howmany-people-eating-disorder-uk/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-drugmisuse/2019/part-4-drug-use-among-young-people> <sup>71</sup> But relating to 2018.

38% of 15/16 year old: that 17% of pupils had taken a drug in 2017-2018: and that cannabis is the drug that most pupils are likely to have taken. Of those who had taken a drug, 18% had taken at least one class A drug<sup>53</sup>. Over the past decade there has also been a growth in young people taking psychoactive substances<sup>73</sup> – for example nitrous oxide (laughing gas).

7.2 Many of the testimonies also spoke of alcohol use: in 2016-17, in 35.8% of all sexual assault cases it was believed that the offender was under the influence of alcohol<sup>54</sup>: and alcohol related violent incidents made up 67% of all weekend violence<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> McManus, S., Meltzer, H., Brugha, T., Bebbington, P., & Jenkins, R. (eds) (2009). Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England 2007: results of a household survey. NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care. [online] Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-in-england-2007-results-of-a-household-survey>

<sup>12</sup> Martin-Merino, E., Ruigomez, A., Wallander, M., Johansson, S. and Garcia-Rodriguez, L. (2009). Prevalence, incidence, morbidity and treatment patterns in a cohort of patients diagnosed with anxiety in UK primary care. *Family Practice*, 27(1), pp.9-16.

7.3 In the NHS Survey from 2018<sup>56</sup> 38% of those aged 11-16 overall said that they drank alcohol a few times a year: by the time young people were 15-16, 66% of them were drinking regularly. The survey also showed that pupils were most likely to be given alcohol by their parents, and secondly their friends, or to have taken it from home with permission. The same survey suggests that pupils were most likely to drink alcohol in their own home, at someone else's home or at parties with friends (40% of young people identified that they would do so there). Pupils drank at parties with friends or at someone else's home as they got older.

7.4 If young people drink, the same survey suggests that 21% of young people who had drunk in the last week had drunk more than 15 units, with girls more likely to be drunk than boys. Having said this, fewer 16-24 year-olds drink than those in older age groups: but if they do drink, they are more likely to drink at high levels – “binge drinking”.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Drugs are classified under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1973: a table is set out at <https://www.gov.uk/penalties-drug-possession-dealing>: this includes crack cocaine, cocaine, ecstasy (MDMA), heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms, methadone, methamphetamine (crystal meth). <sup>73</sup> A substance which causes hallucinations, drowsiness or changes in alertness, perception of time and space or mood.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/adhocs/009372dataonalcoholrelatedincidentsyearsendingmarch2011tomarch2017crimesurveyforenglandandwales>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/adhocs/009372dataonalcoholrelatedincidentsyearsendingmarch2011tomarch2017crimesurveyforenglandandwales>

<sup>56</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/smoking-drinking-and-drug-useamong-young-people-in-england/2018/part-6-young-people-who-drink-alcohol>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/drugusealcoholandsmoking/datasets/adultdrinkinghabits>

## Rape myths and understanding by young people of issues around consent

8.1 Research from both the US and Australia shows that young men and women have a different understanding of how sex is “negotiated”:<sup>58</sup> young women still feel under pressure to submit to unwanted sex, while only young men are perceived to be the “*initiators*.” As the research published in 2013 by the Children’s Commissioner for England<sup>59</sup> shows, this is some way from a model of positive consent which involves active communication and mutual pleasure, which is recognised by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the need for consent to be “*freely given*”.

8.2 Findings from the 2013 research in England said that young people understand what is meant by giving consent but have a very limited sense of what getting consent may involve. Whilst they have a theoretical, abstract understanding of what is “consent,” when faced with real life contexts, they were less able to understand this. It finds that the most significant influence on young people’s understanding of consent is constructions of gender, particularly of masculinity – the “*sexual double standard*”. Boys who have sex are praised: girls are condemned as “sluts”. Young men feel under pressure to act certain ways to gain the respect of their peers – which often involves having had sex. The researchers showed how, if young men feared losing status and position within peer groups for “*respecting a girl’s decision*,” then having status may well require engaging in sexual encounters which are not mutually negotiated.

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8.3 The young women in the research reported feeling pressurised into sex if they were in a relationship. If they were subject to sexual violence, their clothing, actions and behaviours were seen as evidence that they were responsible for what happened to them. Many young people were relying upon visual cues, rather than communication and discussion. Rape was also seen as something that happened between strangers. It also found that those aged 13-14 were less likely to recognise non-consensual sex than older age groups.

8.4 Discussion by the reviewers with the lead officer for rape and sexual violence in the Metropolitan Police reinforced that, in work that they have done to try and dispel “rape myths” on social media with young people, they still display basic misunderstandings of consent and sexual violence – for example believing that it was not rape if you were in a relationship, or if you did not actively say no.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cited in the Children’s Commissioner report. A Powell: Sex, Power and Consent, Youth Culture and the Unwritten rules: Cambridge University Press (2010) and Powers – Albanesi (2009) Gender and Sexual agency: how young people make choices about sex. Lanham MD: Lexington books.

<sup>59</sup> Coy, Kelly, Elvin [https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Sex\\_without\\_consent\\_I\\_suppose\\_that\\_is\\_rape.pdf](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Sex_without_consent_I_suppose_that_is_rape.pdf) by Coy, Kelly, Elvines, Garner and Kanveredzie, November 2013

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Det Supt Stephanie Larimore, Met Police, May 2021.

## The “manosphere” and the education of young men

9.1 The “manosphere” is used by some researchers and journalists in this area to refer to an online movement that promotes misogyny and hatred towards women.<sup>61</sup> In her book, *Men who hate Women*, Laura Bates<sup>62</sup> describes a trend she has seen when she goes to speak in schools: young men, who have been watching You Tube, and reading threads on social media sites (such as Reddit), proceed to repeat online discourses which suggest that women lie about rape; that feminism is a man hating conspiracy designed to let women take over the world; and that men rather than women are the real victims of gender inequality than women.<sup>63</sup> They also peddle stereotypes about women not being as able as men: that men are biologically superior and that therefore inequality is natural and normal. Interviews with young men she undertook described anti-feminist views coming from all over social media and being shared between young men.<sup>64</sup> She links this in her book to ways in which mainstream media messaging sets what she calls a “loosely sexist and stereotypical foundation”<sup>63</sup> in which the manosphere can then “easily build.” In particular, she links this narrative with the availability of online pornography and that young people view their online and offline work as “the same.” Ms. Bates interviewed Ben Hurst of the Good Lads Initiative<sup>64</sup> (a not-for-profit organisation now called “Beyond Equality”) which works with boys and men to think about issues of safety and equality. He estimated in his interview that about 70% of the boys with whom they have contact

*“have come into contact with that kind of material”* and he considered that is *“influences the way that they think to varying degrees”*. Ms. Bates observes that these young people are not part of fora dedicated to the manosphere but have absorbed aspects of this ideology which has been packaged and circulated into wider society by media figures and through the use of jokes or memes.<sup>87</sup>

9.2 Bates also refers to numerous reports and information which suggest that there is a growing indoctrination from You Tube videos and other platforms which produces slick material which draws young men into a network of influence which promotes misogyny through mass exposure, drawing upon research published in 2018 by Rebecca Lewis of Data and Society.<sup>65</sup> To young people, Ms. Bates identifies that many of these videos, created by fringe figures are seen as *“widespread, valid views”* which then amplifies and spreads those views and produces anti-feminist material which young men (particularly because of the way that algorithms work) have limited access to alternative views. Some manosphere websites even promote and provide “easy to understand” guides which are available free. These include<sup>66</sup> categories such

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<sup>61</sup> See for example, Laura Bates, *Men who hate Women* : Simon and Schuster, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, Chapter called : Men who don't know that they hate women. <sup>83</sup>

Chapter, Men who Don't know that they hate women, p268 – 269. <sup>84</sup>

Laura Bates ibid, p269.

<sup>63</sup> Bates, ibid p270

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.beyondequality.org/about/about-us> <sup>87</sup>

Bates, ibid, p275.

<sup>65</sup> Ms. Bates explains the research and the impact that this can have upon young men at pp. 278 – 299 of *Men who Hate Women*.

<sup>66</sup> Bates, p 290 citing the “Red Pill Primer for Boys”

<sup>90</sup> Bates, p290.

as “Why Feminism Hates you”, and that feminists believe that “all sex is rape.”<sup>90</sup> Bates describes it thus:

*“The boys I meet at schools don’t even know that they hate women. They are mild mannered and wide eyed. They think it’s only polite to point out factual inaccuracies and lies repeated by feminists . They have seen misogyny online so often and heard it promoted so persuasively that they wouldn’t even recognise it as a form of hate.”<sup>67</sup>*

## Sex and relationship education

10.1 National and international research has shown that good quality sex and relationship education operates as a protective function, with children not only choosing to delay the first time they have sex, but also that sex is more likely to be consensual and are more likely to recognise abusive behaviours and report them.<sup>68</sup> It has only become compulsory in all schools in England since September 2020.<sup>69</sup> Survey results prior to 2020 rated their relationships and sex education in schools as “very bad, bad or OK” in 75% of cases<sup>70</sup>. Ofsted criticised the quality and patchiness of this education in reports it commissioned about PSHE (person, social, health and economic education) – particularly identifying that teachers had not received adequate training and the subject was not given adequate space in the curriculum.<sup>95</sup> The Ofsted review of 32 schools in 2021 related to sexually harmful behaviour identified that children and young people were rarely positive about the PSHE they had receive – feeling it was too little, too late and the curriculum was not equipping them with the reality of their lives. They therefore turned to social media or their peers to educate each other.<sup>71</sup>

10.2 The Department for Education has, in its response to the review, identified the need for greater training of staff in delivering this curriculum. The National Strategy to tackle violence against women and girls<sup>72</sup> includes a pledge by the Department for Education to develop additional support to help teachers deliver the relationships, sex and health educational curriculum effectively and confidently and to revise existing guidance.

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<sup>67</sup> Bates, p299.

<sup>68</sup> [www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/evidence](http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/evidence).

<sup>69</sup> Since the implementation of the Education and Social Work Act 2017 and the Relationships, Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019 .

<sup>70</sup> [www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/RSE/theEvidence](http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/RSE/theEvidence) - Sex Education Forum SRE survey 2013. <sup>95</sup> Ofsted (2007) Time for Change? PSHE in Schools London. Ofsted (2010): PSHE in schools. Ofsted (2013): Not yet good enough: PSHE in schools.

<sup>71</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges).

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy-launched>

<sup>98</sup> Jensen: the Teenage Brain: Dr. Francis E Jensen with Amy Ellis Nutt: ISBN10:0062067842 published 2015 (Harper)

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/952527/Changing\\_Gender\\_Norms-Engaging\\_with\\_Men\\_and\\_Boys.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952527/Changing_Gender_Norms-Engaging_with_Men_and_Boys.pdf) <sup>100</sup>P75, paragraph 6.2.4 *ibid*.

## Neurodevelopment and the teenage brain: risk taking

11.1 Since the 1990's, neurological imaging has enabled neuroscientists to recognise that the adolescent brain is still growing and maturing. The last part of the brain to be fully developed is the prefrontal cortex, which is the area of the brain involved in decision making, planning and self-control. Their capabilities in this area are limited because the signals going from the front to the back of the brain have not as yet been fully developed. This is why risk taking and impulsive behaviours are more common amongst teenagers and young adults. Their ability to think ahead, and to realize the consequences of their actions is more limited than it is as adults (over the age of 25). Adolescents are also undergoing major changes to their limbic system – the area of the brain which controls emotions – at the onset of puberty. There is a mismatch in development between the impulse control part of the brain and the hormone and emotion fuelled part of the brain: this mismatch may be a factor which exacerbates risk-taking behaviours.<sup>98</sup>

## Gender Norms

12.1 The government published research in 2019 carried out by academics at Durham University about changing gender norms and how to engage with men and boys about this.<sup>99</sup> Gender norms are the different practices expected by society – usually implicitly or informally – of men and women. A school, as an institution which has structures, processes and systems, will embed a culture about gender norms both consciously and unconsciously that will reflect the culture it has emerged from and by which it is surrounded. The researchers<sup>100</sup> identified that some of the “norms” of masculinity for young boys and men is “hardness”, sporting prowess, being “cool” and pretending not to care about schoolwork (although reflected that there is a considerable variation here, with social class and ethnicity being more influential factors on achievement than gender).

12.2 The literature review undertaken by these researchers identified that gendered social norms continue to significantly shape the lives of young men. The literature suggests that, whilst there have been changes in the perceived definition of what it is to be a man, there has not been a reduction in the need for men and boys to conform to certain general ideas of masculinity. So, for example, survey results from 2019

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conducted as part of this research still identified that men should not “show weakness” and should be “physically strong”. Ideas that men should still be the primary earner in a family are also still influential. The researchers also found that the notion that women acted “hard to get for sex” was still a belief held (strongly or moderately) by 38% of those surveyed.<sup>73</sup> The researchers identify, however, that these gendered norms do vary for those with different characteristics and experiences – and are shifting. It is easy to make generalisations, but approaches towards masculinity vary by age, ethnicity, social class, disability and sexuality and gender identity.

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<sup>73</sup> See research set out at *ibid*, pp8 and 9 of conclusions (and for more detailed analysis pp23-73).

12.3 There is a negative impact upon the health and wellbeing of men and boys of internalising these norms, in particular in not addressing their mental health and seeking help when they need it<sup>74</sup>; bullying; and being subject to or the perpetrator of violence. The Advertising regulator recognises that men are increasingly experiencing harm as a consequence of a pressure to have a certain masculine body image.<sup>75</sup>

12.4 The literature also shows that norms of “masculinity” play a central form in the manifestation of violence against women and girls: that there are norms and expectations of boys and men which may be seen to enable, entitle or require them to use violence in specific settings to assert their masculine power. These ideas interact with sexist attitudes as a major cause of gender inequality, with dominance and control over women being a key part of some ideas of what it is to be a man.<sup>76</sup> One study<sup>77</sup> seems to suggest that there are five key processes through which masculine norms shape the likelihood that men or boys will experience or perpetrate violence:

*(a) The demand to continually achieve and re-achieve what is seen as socially recognised “manhood”.*

*(b) The continual policing of the performance of masculinity.*

*(c) The “gendering of the heart”, with men and boys discouraged from showing emotional vulnerability and permitted only a limited range of emotions.*

*(d) Constructing ideas about manhood and womanhood through the dividing of spaces and cultures by gender, with social spaces associated with men often becoming environments in which violence is rehearsed and reinforced.*

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*(e) The reinforcement of patriarchal power, with violence being shaped by processes which serve to reinforce structures of power that advantage men over women, and certain men over other men.*

12.5 Of particular note for work in schools is that the research suggests that violence against women is linked to the way that men relate to each other. Violence is seen as a currency of masculine identity – and women are the “objects” of that currency. Work on “lad culture” in universities in the UK shows that the relationship between male peers creates a context which encourages

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<sup>74</sup> Research set out at *ibid* footnote 121, pp31-32.

<sup>75</sup> Research set out at *ibid* footnote 121, pp32-35.

<sup>76</sup> See paragraph 3.5 of the research *ibid* footnote 21: citing WHO research from 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Cited at paragraph 3.5 of the research *ibid* conducted by Heilman and Barker (2018).

or enables sexual violence. Social bonds between peers shape their relations with women in ways which could encourage sexually aggressive behaviours, such as the prioritising of men’s friendships over relations with women: having sex with women being a way to obtain status: the enactment of male bonding through sexual itself – and that masculine storytelling of sexual practices to male audiences to reassert bonds of masculinity and friendships.<sup>78</sup>

- 12.6 The research also shows that in order to change violence against women, one should work both with the individual but also wider social norms present in families, peer groups and communities as they are at the core of the behaviour which contributes to that violence.<sup>107</sup> The research also suggests that this needs to be done with both sexes, and not just with one.
  - 12.7 The conclusion of this research was that there was a need to find ways to engage with men and boys positively, which do not carry negative preconceptions (based upon stereotypical ideas of masculinity) and which can provide “hope and optimism” for men and boys about how they can be part of changes in social norms. They identified that challenging such norms could assist in preventing violence against women, promoting gender equitable behaviour but also to improve the health and wellbeing of boys and men themselves.<sup>108</sup> They make a number of recommendations the most pertinent of which to Westminster School and similar educational institutions are:
    - 12.7.1 Engaging and having a “whole school” approach to challenge gendered norms involving pupils, staff, parents and other members of the community.
    - 12.7.2 Having a positive approach through dialogue and showing them how they can make changes to their everyday lives.
    - 12.7.3 Specialist training on working with those who may have perpetrated violence.
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- 12.7.4 Greater reflection and learning about gender norms and inequalities throughout the school curriculum.
  - 12.7.5 Initial and continuing training on the influence of gender norms and stereotyping and the benefits of challenging them for both sexes.
  - 12.7.6 Sports teams and institutions encouraged to promote positive attitudes towards sex, gender, race and homophobia.

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<sup>78</sup> Paragraph 3.5.1 of the research *ibid* by Phipps (2018) and Flood (2008) from Australia.

<sup>107</sup> Paragraph 3.5.2 of the research *ibid* by Casey et al and Pease and Flood (2018) <sup>108</sup> Paragraph 6.2 of the *ibid*, research footnote 221 p75.

- 12.7.7 Providing boys and young men with opportunities in school and community contexts to learn the skills required for caring and domestic work, and to explore and develop caring roles in their lives.
- 12.7.8 Working to intervene to address mental health problems in men and how they may relate to masculinity and to give boys a chance to speak about these issues and to understand that mental health problems need not be seen as an impediment to employment or success.
- 12.7.9 Challenging the dominance of a workaholic culture and enable men to be able to care for their children and other dependents.
- 12.7.10 Transforming gender norms and tackling gender inequalities as a central part to prevent violence against women and girls

## Homophobia and transphobia in educational settings

13.1 Research carried out in 2014 suggests that about one half of primary school teachers report that their pupils experience homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying, with nine out of ten secondary school teachers reporting that their pupils experience this form of bullying.<sup>79</sup> Research by Stonewall published in 2017<sup>80</sup> found improvements in the number of young people being bullied from their previous reports over a decade, but that 45% of LGBT pupils and 64% of trans pupils are bullied for their sexual orientation or gender reassignment. Half of all pupils hear homophobic slurs “frequently” or “often” at school. Only 20% of pupils had been taught about safe sex in the context of same sex relationships, and levels of self-harming amongst transgender young people is over 80%, with three in five lesbian, gay and bisexual young people having self-harmed. The government produced guidance in 2017 on tackling bullying, which included a section on tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying.<sup>111</sup> There has also been research and campaigns run by the Equalities Office within the Cabinet Office, and anti-bullying week, which runs annually, has had a specific focus upon LGBT bullying over the past decade in some years (for example 2013, 2015).

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<sup>79</sup> Mitchell M, Gray.M and Beninger K (2014) Tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying among school age children and young people: Evidence review and typology of initiatives. London. Nat Cen.

<sup>80</sup> [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/the\\_school\\_report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/the_school_report_2017.pdf)

<sup>111</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/623895/Preventing\\_and\\_tackling\\_bullying\\_advice.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623895/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf)