

April 2021

Dear Headteacher,

I hope this letter finds you well, and please let me begin by thanking you and your staff for your work and dedication over this challenging year.

I am writing to you today in my role as London's Victims' Commissioner, in the context of the recent focus on issues of sexual assault and rape culture within schools. You will likely have read coverage of the website 'Everyone's Invited', and may even have seen testimonies written by your own students presented on the site. Each of these accounts is devastating to read, and speaks to a culture amongst many young people that normalises and trivialises sexual violence.

Whilst many of these accounts are criminal in nature, we cannot ignore the role that education (both from school and home) plays in promoting healthy and consensual relationships, and in identifying and understanding behaviours which are not acceptable.

I hope you will agree that we must do all we can in order to support those who have had experiences such as those expressed on 'Everyone's Invited', and how important it is to adequately educate and engage students, staff, and parents to prevent further incidents.

Support for Victims

First and foremost, I would like to ensure that those who have been victims of harassment or sexual assault know that support is available for them, and where they can access this.

As of 1st April 2021, the NSPCC established a free helpline to support those who have experienced abuse in educational settings. This helpline provides advice and support for both children and adults; regarding their own experiences of abuse, or concern they have for others; and has already taken calls from many students, parents, carers, teachers, and professionals.

The NSPCC may refer or signpost to other organisations depending on the details, and we have worked with them to ensure they are clear on the support pathways in London. Further information on some of these support services is available in an appendix to this letter, however for clarity in messaging we encourage people to contact the NSPCC helpline in the first instance.

To contact the helpline, you can call **0800 136 663**. The line is open 8.00 – 22.00 Monday to Friday (including bank holidays), and 8.00 – 18.00 over the weekends. Support can also be reached by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk, and more information on the helpline is available via the [NSPCC Website](#).

Resources and Training

Lessons on sexual education, healthy relationships, and recognising abuse and violence play a crucial role in the development of young people, and these sessions should be led by specialist organisations who have appropriate training and feel fully comfortable and able to engage with students' questions and concerns.

To that end, I would like to make you aware of a number of organisations that can offer tailored training and helpful resources for students, staff, and parents. We have spoken with organisations mentioned in this letter, all of whom are happy to be contacted directly if you would like more information on the services they offer or the resources they can provide.

- **Tender** have a number of projects which they deliver in educational settings, including a 'healthy relationships project' for secondary schools. You can reach them via home@tender.org.uk and find more information on their [website](#).
- **UK Feminista** provide resources and training for students, teachers, and parents on tackling sexism in schools. Their training can be delivered in various formats and includes a [90-minute free online training](#) course for teachers. They also provide free classroom activities, staff and student surveys, example school policies, and templates for a school-wide strategy. You can enquire about their training by emailing education@ukfeminista.org.uk and can find more information on their [website](#).
- **Beyond Equality** work specifically with boys and young men to create open and interactive discussions, so they can be happier and be part of preventing inequality and violence. Beyond Equality's school [programme](#) give boys space to open up and talk about sensitive topics: masculinities; inclusion and allyship; consent and healthy relationships. Further information about their work and schools programme is available on their [website](#).
- **Against Violence & Abuse (AVA)** offer classroom-based and online training to prevent gender-based violence. You can reach them via training@avaproject.org.uk and find more information on their [website](#).
- **Women and Girls Network** offer support for victims as well as training and consultancy for organisations on violence against women and girls. You can reach them via advice@wgn.org.uk or contact their Young Women's Service via ywa@wgn.org.uk. More information is available on their [website](#).
- **Rape Crisis South London** operate the rape and sexual abuse support centre, which also provides relevant training and prevention work. They can be contacted via training.coordinator@rasasc.org.uk and more information is available on their [website](#).
- **School of Sexuality Education** is referenced on the 'Everyone's Invited' website and provides in-school workshops on a range of topics including positive relationships, pornography, and consent. You can contact them via their [website](#).

The above resources should be considered in the context of schools dedicating themselves to a 'whole school approach' to tackling this issue. This means that action to promote sex equality is guided by an overarching framework and involves all members of the school community – teachers, students, and parents. It requires a consistent and continuous approach in order to succeed.

A key facet of this approach is ensuring that every teacher has been trained in the fundamental principles of what constitutes sexism, understanding what sexual harassment is, and how these issues manifest in schools and wider society. I am urging every school in London to commit that every teacher will receive such training; this will help to provide consistency of understanding for staff, parents, and students. The organisation 'UK Feminista' has developed an excellent guide to taking a 'Whole School Approach', which can be found on their [website](#).

Moving Forwards

You may have been made aware that the police response to 'Everyone's Invited' is now being co-ordinated nationally by the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on child protection. Through Operation Hydrant (the coordination hub which delivers the national policing response to abuse in educational settings) the police are reviewing all reports and, where possible, identifying the school; whether the person reporting is a current or former pupil; whether it's peer-on-peer; and what type of offence may have been committed. They will produce a statistical analysis of reports over the next few weeks.

As well as exploring the training and resources available through the organisations listed above, I ask for your commitment to tackle the behaviours that foster sexual harassment and rape culture. We cannot allow the current culture to continue unchallenged, and I support the calls from 'Everyone's Invited' for schools to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to these matters. I ask that you ensure your disciplinary proceedings are fit for the purpose of tackling the misogyny, sexism, harassment, abuse, and assault we are seeing.

We know from research and experience that students do not always feel confident in disclosing harassment and abuse in schools, and so more needs to be done to encourage this. All staff members should have some level of awareness of these issues, and it is my view that there should be [an] appointed, trained member[s] of staff (such as a guidance counsellor) that students can approach with these issues. This role should work closely with the RSE and safeguarding leads, and should be known by all students who may want to disclose.

I hope you find this information useful, and if you have questions for me or would like further advice on any of the topics raised in this letter, please do reach out to my team via VictimsCommissioner@mopac.london.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Claire Waxman
Independent Victims' Commissioner for London

Annex – Support Services in London

London Victim and Witness Service

The main ‘front door’ for victim/witness referrals in London is the London Victim and Witness Service (LVWS).



LVWS offer support for adult victims and witnesses of crime in London including practical and emotional support and advice for adult victims of crime; independent advocacy for victims/survivors of domestic abuse; access to Restorative Justice; pre-trial support for witnesses; support for victims and witnesses of major crime incidents; and a named caseworker allocated for all referrals.

<https://www.londonvws.org.uk/>

0808 168 9291

Children and Young People’s Victim and Witness Support Service



This service, operated by Victim Support, is the main support service in London for children and young victims and witnesses of crime. Support is provided on a one to one basis by trained caseworkers in a confidential space that is suitable for children and young people

The Children and Young People’s Victim and Witness Service supports children and young people aged 4-17 affected by crime, whether it has been reported to the police or not.

<https://www.londonvws.org.uk/supporting-young-victims-of-crime>

08 08 16 89 111

London Survivors Gateway

The Gateway is a partnership between the four London Rape Crisis Centres, Galop, Survivors UK and the Havens, and is run by the Women and Girls Network.



It provides a single point of contact for survivors of sexual violence, their families, and agencies. The service provides information on what help is available in London after rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, or any form of sexual violence, and offers support to access these services.

<https://survivorsgateway.london/>

0808 801 0860

The Lighthouse

The Lighthouse is a multi-agency service for children and young people who have experienced any form of sexual abuse, including exploitation. They offer a child-centred approach, providing guidance and support to help children and young people recover.



The Lighthouse is the UK's first Child House. They focus on getting children and young people the right help at the right time, by putting all the services needed to respond to sexual abuse under one roof. This service is available to children and young people in Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington.

www.thelighthouse-london.org.uk

020 3049 0010