

Forest Oak School

&

Merstone School



Child Exploitation Policy

Draft for Governors

Author K. Poxon.

October 2025

Forest Oak and Merstone Schools

Child Exploitation Policy

(Including Criminal, Sexual and Other Forms of Exploitation)

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1. Policy Statement

Forest Oak and Merstone Schools are committed to safeguarding every pupil from all forms of exploitation.

Our pupils have **moderate to severe learning difficulties** and may have **limited communication, understanding and social awareness**, making them particularly vulnerable to being manipulated, coerced or groomed by others for criminal, sexual or financial gain.

This policy sets out how we **identify, prevent and respond** to exploitation in line with:

- *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)*
- *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)*
- *DfE Drugs: advice for schools (2012)*
- Home Office / National Crime Agency guidance on **county lines and child criminal exploitation (CCE)**
- Local Safeguarding Partnership procedures

Safeguarding and welfare of the child take **precedence over disciplinary action**.

2. Aims

1. Raise staff awareness of how exploitation affects children with SEND.
 2. Provide clear reporting and referral procedures.
 3. Ensure timely, proportionate responses that prioritise safety.
 4. Embed education, prevention and multi-agency working.
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3. Scope

Applies to:

- All pupils on roll, on site or under the schools' care off-site.
 - All staff, volunteers, visitors, contractors and governors.
 - Both Forest Oak (MLD) and Merstone (SLD) Schools.
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4. Definition of Exploitation

Exploitation involves taking advantage of a child or young person for another's benefit.

It can include:

- **Criminal exploitation (CCE)** – grooming or coercing a child to carry, store or sell drugs, money or weapons, or commit theft.
- **County lines** – transporting or storing drugs/money between areas under threat or coercion.
- **Sexual exploitation (CSE)** – manipulation into sexual activity through gifts, affection, money or substances.
- **Financial/material exploitation** – using a child's money, bank account or benefits.
- **Online exploitation** – grooming via the internet or social media.

A child may be both a **victim and a perpetrator** of exploitation.

5. Risk and Vulnerability Factors

Pupils at Forest Oak and Merstone may face increased risk due to:

- Learning and communication difficulties limiting understanding of risk.
 - Desire for friendship or belonging.
 - Low self-esteem or social isolation.
 - Limited supervision outside school.
 - Family or community vulnerabilities (substance misuse, poverty, neglect).
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6. Indicators of Possible Exploitation

Staff should be alert to combinations of indicators, including:

- Sudden new possessions, cash, vapes or gifts.
 - Older peers or unknown adults collecting pupils.
 - Unexplained absences or lateness.
 - Multiple phones, SIMs or social media accounts.
 - Fear of specific people or places.
 - Change in behaviour, secrecy, anxiety, self-harm or withdrawal.
 - Possession of substances or paraphernalia without understanding them.
 - For Merstone pupils: physical distress or unusual reactions during travel routes or to certain individuals.
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7. Prevention

- **Curriculum:** age- and ability-appropriate RSHE, PSHE and communication work on consent, safe relationships, risks and help-seeking.
 - **Staff training:** annual safeguarding and exploitation awareness for all staff; enhanced training for DSLs and family liaison officers.
 - **Environment:** trusted-adult culture; supervision of arrivals/departures; monitoring of social media use on devices.
 - **Parental engagement:** workshops and guidance on signs of grooming and online safety.
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8. Staff Responsibilities

All staff must:

1. **Report immediately** to the DSL any concern, however small.
 2. **Record factual observations** — who, what, when, where.
 3. **Avoid investigating or confronting** suspected exploiters.
 4. **Preserve evidence** (messages, CCTV, packaging).
 5. **Support and reassure** the pupil in an appropriate way.
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9. DSL Responsibilities

The **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** will:

- Evaluate information and decide on **referral to Children's Social Care / MASH and police**.
 - Use local **CCE/CSE risk assessment tools**.
 - Avoid parental contact if it increases risk.
 - Record and track all cases on the safeguarding system.
 - Lead multi-agency meetings and ensure ongoing support plans.
 - Report anonymised data to governors each term.
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10. Response Pathway

1. **Staff identify concern** → report to DSL.
2. **DSL assesses risk** → if exploitation suspected, make immediate **referral to MASH and police**.

3. **Safeguarding strategy meeting** arranged by social care.
 4. **Individual safety plan** created in school (trusted adult, supervision, travel arrangements).
 5. **Ongoing monitoring** and review with multi-agency partners.
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11. Supporting the Child

- Assign a **key adult** for daily check-ins.
 - Provide **safe spaces** within school.
 - Adapt communication (visual symbols, social stories, repetition).
 - Involve **parents/carers** unless unsafe.
 - Refer to **CAMHS or local exploitation support services**.
 - Continue education and inclusion wherever possible.
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12. Multi-Agency Collaboration

We work with:

- **Police (Child Exploitation / County Lines)**
 - **Children's Social Care / MASH**
 - **Health services** (school nurse, CAMHS)
 - **Voluntary agencies** (Barnardo's, The Children's Society, Catch22)
 - **Local Authority exploitation and contextual safeguarding teams**
 - **Education and Family Support Services**
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13. Information Sharing

- Information shared lawfully under *KCSIE* and *Working Together*.
 - Share only what is necessary, with those who need it, to safeguard the child.
 - Always record the rationale and outcomes of information shared.
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14. Staff Conduct

Staff must model safe, respectful relationships.

Any staff member who forms inappropriate relationships, fails to report concerns, or shares confidential information improperly will face disciplinary action in line with the Staff Code of Conduct.
