

Barley Lane School

Friendship, Optimism, Hardwork

1st July 2021

Ofsted: culture change needed to tackle 'normalised' sexual harassment in schools and colleges

Dave and I as acting and retiring head respectively have been talking about this and briefly on a page I would like to contribute what follows in explaining why I think our school community is very well-placed to respond:

- In our specialist setting as our SEMH risk document describes *“our student body by its nature contains and presents a whole range of known and unknown (latent risk) and also emerging and shifting risks because being multiply and diversely risky is a core and common feature of the children and young people in our care”* and we are alive to peer on peer sexual abuse and this is at the very the sharp end of a continuum that includes persistent low level insidious and corrosive sexual harassment again something identified as a known and potential risk in some of our young people and in short as is so often the case our specialist work insists and has always meant we are and must be vigilant about risk in ways mainstream schools are not.
- Our stated and published core ethos and values include a *“friendship”* that is unpicked and explained as *“respect*-empathy-forgiveness-compassion-**protection**”* and our people are selected and retained and developed only if they are committed to and live out these values.
- Our preoccupation with anticipation, proactivity and so prevention scaffolded and facilitated by an obsessiveness about rigorous visible and intelligent supervision that is perpetually tweaked and refined and if necessary overhauled (attend any briefing/debriefing) what we describe simply as *“the massive significance always of putting children and their supervision first”*
- As Ofsted pointed out *“The key to the safe environment stems from the strong and trusting relationships that exist between pupils, their families and staff.”* And here is the precious oil that makes the whole mechanism, the engine of safety and wellbeing work effectively: your relentless skilled investment in and commitment to, your authentic care and compassion for the children and young people and their families this is what empowers you and them and makes you vigilant and means you matter and are influential in their lives and so critically you are more likely to notice or be disclosed to or shared with and those *“strong and trusting relationships”* mean you can make a difference.

Relentlessly cherish, protect and sustain and develop these core elements and you create a context, a community where belonging and being safe and happy can and will and do thrive and so bullying and harassment of all kinds will struggle to get a foothold...

Michael