



## Sexual Harassment in Schools: RLS Responds

OFSTED have highlighted the growing concerns that in many schools there is a culture which permits sexual harassment, and implicitly accepts misogynistic behaviour. The Royal Latin School knows that we must acknowledge that such issues affect our own school community, and so we wanted to share with you some of what we are doing with regard to this difficult and important matter. We feel strongly that we need to educate and empower our young people to be able to recognise and call out inappropriate sexual behaviour, and also help them to feel confident in the support that they will get in this from school.

The website *Everyone's Invited*, whose collection of anonymous testimony this year drew global attention to the problem in UK schools and Universities, defined 'rape culture' as follows:

*Rape culture is when attitudes, behaviours and beliefs in society have the effect of normalising and trivialising sexual violence. This culture includes misogyny, rape jokes, sexual harassment (groping, non-consensual touching), image based abuse (upskirting, non-consensual sharing of intimate photos, cyberflashing), and sexual coercion. When behaviours such as these are normalised this can act as a gateway to more extreme acts such as sexual assault and rape.*

The Royal Latin School knows that no school can safely say that they are immune from this issue. We searched the *Everyone's Invited* site for any mention of our school, and were shocked and saddened to find one piece of testimony where the person identified themselves as a former Royal Latin student and reported a sexual assault by students from one of our local Universities. The incident referred to dated some years back, and the details are not sufficient to identify any of the students involved or the circumstances. What we did notice, though, was that the student said that at the time they did not feel able to tell either the school or the university authorities, and had not reported the assault. They also said that a friend had apparently trivialised the experience by their reaction. We are therefore taking action to try and redress this.

Going forward, we are working on the assumption that there may be unreported incidents and current issues that need addressing. We want to hear and understand the experiences and voices of our students about issues of sexual harassment, and take swift and direct action to address their concerns. We urge all our students to share their experiences, and help us to make a real change for the better in our school culture.

Our team of school counsellors are here to support any student who needs support at this time, as are our peer listeners, safeguarding leads, Heads of Year and the current student leadership team. Please contact any of these to raise your concerns or ask for individual support. The confidential email [amicus@royallatin.org](mailto:amicus@royallatin.org) can be used for this at any time, and anonymous testimony can be submitted through the suggestion boxes in student reception. Contact our safeguarding team directly through [safeguarding@royallatin.org](mailto:safeguarding@royallatin.org) at any time. At the end of this article is a list of other organisations which offer specific and anonymous support.

## Student Testimonies



The *Everyone's Invited* movement is focused on exposing rape culture through conversation, education and support. We at the Royal Latin School aim to do exactly that through creating a safe environment where students can feel fully supported and comfortable to talk about their experiences regarding sexual assault. I strongly believe any form of sexual assault is unacceptable, and no one should ever have to experience this. I want to help educate students to understand that any behavior that is deemed offensive or unwelcome, and is detrimental to the physical, emotional and psychological health of a person should not be tolerated. These are serious and real issues. As a mental health ambassador, I fully understand the serious long term impact that these traumatic experiences can have on an individual's mental health and wellbeing. From my experience, RLS has always had zero tolerance towards any form of harassment and will continue to address these issues appropriately and actively support the mental health of all students.

***Roshni - Mental Health Ambassador***



As a young woman I am urgently aware of the damage rape culture and misogyny has on teenagers today and, although extremely upsetting, I was not surprised by the number of schools mentioned in the testimonies on the 'Everyone's Invited' website. I am confident in saying that the inclusion of the Royal Latin School on this list gives us a chance to reflect and grow as a community and it is necessary to involve everybody in making systematic change, rather than only those affected by this prevalent issue. It is our job to combat the damaging attitudes rape culture ingrains in us from a very young age, and creating an environment where students feel able to call out problematic behaviour and school policies is essential. The school's anti-bullying group 'Amicus' is focused on not only advising and supporting victims of bullying (sexual bullying included) but is widening its focus to

prevent these problems before they arise by educating our peers and raising awareness about topics such as this.

***Elsie - Amicus Student Leader***



The inclusion of RLS on the 'Everyone's Invited' list gives us a chance to reflect and improve on our school's processes and culture to create a safer environment for all students. The prevalence of rape culture and the dangers it presents must not be ignored and it is essential that our school policies and actions reflect the stance that sexual harassment or assault of any kind is not tolerated and ensure that our school provides an environment where students feel confident to call out problematic behaviour and seek support if needed. I am glad to see the changes RLS is making to school policies, and that emphasis is being placed on better education and support throughout the school. I believe that we must take an active role to combat the attitudes of rape culture in the school community, and that through these changes we can help prevent and deal with these problems through raising awareness and

enabling people to speak up.

***Emily - LGBTQ+ Ambassador***



Seeing the school on “Everyone’s Invited” was disheartening to put it mildly. However, upon reflection, I realise it highlights my naivety on the topic of sexual assault. I myself have never felt that I have ever been the victim of something of this and never have I felt worried or take precaution to prevent such things to take place; as a result, it’s almost something that I’ve pushed aside as “something that only happens on the news” and I do not doubt that many of us may feel the same. This should also stand as a reminder of the influence of the normalisation of rape culture in our society and how it creates a domino effect which increases sexual assaults, silences victims and downplays the effects of sexual violence; we, as a community, can not allow an environment where we tolerate or take little to no action against such behaviour. This is why it is so important, that we as the students of Royal Latin

School must take an active role in supporting and believing victims, eliminating toxic “banter” and above all, educating ourselves about how else we can ensure that sexual assault is prevented and a toxic culture of shame, silencing and secondary victimisation is condemned by all.

***Fijfi - Deputy Head Boy***



In a survey for the Guardian, 86% of women aged between 18 and 24 said they had been harassed, and 11% did not feel comfortable answering the question. *Everyone’s Invited* has prompted the discussion about the culture in schools and has shown there is no room for complacency around this debate. At RLS, we have a collective responsibility to create a safe space for reporting sexual harassment, and ensure that all students are educated and aware about the weight of these issues. By facilitating a space for students to speak out about their experiences and receive support, we can hopefully work towards removing the stigma surrounding this topic, and victims will feel able to come forward. As a student leader for Amicus, I hope I can help to raise awareness and enable students to speak up.

***Niamh - Amicus Student Leader***



The *Everyone’s Invited* initiative gives people the opportunity to speak out about experiences involving the rape culture that is seemingly more prominent than ever in today’s society. This opportunity is crucial, and is incredibly important to an abundance of people dealing with this. Upon seeing the Royal Latin School on the list in question, I was certainly dismayed, however, I was also fully confident that we would push to do something about this, reflecting upon initiatives already in place and taking immediate action- it’s excellent to know that this was correct. This school, staff and students alike, are becoming increasingly aware every day of the normalisation of this culture (especially amongst young people) and the damaging effects this can have of those involved; we do not stand to tolerate it in any form and intend to create an even safer and more comfortable space within the walls of this school that we hope can be transferred into society on

some level. We cannot allow for this to go unnoticed in any sense. As a young woman and Amicus ambassador, I am wholeheartedly invested in combating this issue alongside my peers, ensuring the toxic and “sweeping under the carpet” attitude that is being ingrained in the minds of adolescents (in particular) is strongly fought.

***Abby - Amicus Student Leader***



Not talking about rape, sexual assault, and rape culture leads to a horrid cycle of nothing happening about it and then no-one talking about it as they think nothing will happen. We at RLS are doing our best to make sure students know that it is safe to talk about it, whether to a teacher or a peer. The more we talk about it the more we can prevent it. Teaching students why rape culture exists and how we can all take an active part in getting rid of it is another priority of ours. RLS strives to be a safe place for all students where they can feel comfortable in themselves, comfortable talking about rape, and comfortable telling the school how we can improve.

***Eva - LGBTQ+ Ambassador***



When I discovered that the Royal Latin was named on “Everyone’s Invited” I was speechless. Sadly, this topic is not something new or something which has never happened before but when it’s close to home it really puts reality into perspective. Frankly, this is something that needs to be addressed. Having the support from the Latin makes a significant difference and it's heartwarming to see how well they have responded and involved students in this issue. This ensures future generations will be more educated to raise awareness. But there’s only so much a school can do, so I would also reinforce to students that you should speak up about rape culture, not spread rumors, support survivors if they come forward and challenge derogatory comments and actions. You have the power to say “no, that’s not right.” As an Amicus Student Leader, I would also stress to use the Amicus email as it will always be anonymous. I am very passionate to provide a “helping hand” for anyone who needs it so no one has to feel alone, vulnerable or unable to voice their concerns. I am looking forward to working with members of staff so we can create a safe space for all, where we can all be more aware and comfortable with talking about sexual harassment. We will not tolerate this, so neither should you.

***Susannah - Amicus Student Leader***

## **Our Action Plan**

- We are determined to foster a school culture which promotes respectful and courteous behaviour from all students in accord with British Values, and rejects all forms of bullying, including sexual bullying. Our School Diversity Week and other regular school-based events and commemorations celebrate this. Assemblies also focus on this aspect of school culture.
- Our Student Leadership Team is working with the Safeguarding Leads so as to find more effective ways of encouraging students to feel safe in confidentially reporting inappropriate behaviour. Anonymity is often a key way to make people feel safer about reporting, and so we have ‘suggestion boxes’ in reception where notes may be placed for the anonymous attention of senior members of staff. However, we also want to educate students about our professional duty of confidentiality, and make it clear that putting their name to something does not mean that their peers will ever find out about what they have said. This work will be done through form time and assemblies, as well as through individual conversations, where appropriate.
- Our existing anti-bullying group ‘Amicus’ offers student support and has a confidential email system in place with the address [amicus@royallatin.org](mailto:amicus@royallatin.org) and students may also contact [safeguarding@royallatin.org](mailto:safeguarding@royallatin.org) in the knowledge that only a qualified Designated Safeguarding Lead will be able to see what they have

said. A reorganisation of the Student Council will provide a strengthened student voice element to support us in further developing our student support.

- Our team of school counsellors now numbers five, and they are available to support students who may have experienced any issues of harassment or sexual violence. Counsellors work closely with our safeguarding team.
- We have enhanced and enlarged our safeguarding team, and now have four Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), including a specialist in sixth form safeguarding and a specialist in cyber-safeguarding. The team meets weekly to plan strategy and discuss ongoing cases, and contextual safeguarding for the school.
- Our RSHE curriculum has been recently updated to include more input about sexual harassment and sexual violence, and space for open guided discussion of online issues around sexting and image sharing. Consent and the understanding of consent is an important part of this curriculum, and teachers are specially trained so as to be able to deliver this effectively.
- Our safeguarding team has read through every piece of testimony on the *Everyone's Invited* site so as to better understand the nature of misogynistic culture in schools, and regularly checks it to identify any new concerns. Staff training is planned for our September INSET which will enhance our existing safeguarding training about identifying early signs of peer-on-peer abuse, and help all staff to better understand the definitions of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and consistently respond appropriately.
- Our record-keeping of behavioural incidents now includes specific tools to analyse any sexual component. We have a new electronic system to record safeguarding information which works with our existing procedures so as to make connections and pick up on sexual harassment at any level. Our Safeguarding Leads and Heads of Year will be looking through existing reports of friendship issues and any bullying behaviour so as to see if there is a component of sexual harassment in any previously reported incidents.
- On reading the testimony we found on *Everyone's Invited*, we immediately contacted the University mentioned and are now working with them, so as to enhance our joint safeguarding. We have also set up a plan for a termly safeguarding meeting between the University and the two secondary schools in Buckingham to share key contextual information about safeguarding and promote a 'joined-up' approach.
- To develop staff and student knowledge about this issue, we are seeking external training to improve our ability to foster a supportive culture that refuses to accept sexism and misogyny. We are working on a plan to train staff, and train student ambassadors to promote the message to all students, starting in year 7, that we will not tolerate 'laddish' behaviour, including a tolerance of 'banter' which legitimises and is a gateway to sexual harassment.
- We have signed up to membership of 'National Online Safety' which provides training and regular updates for staff and parents around issues of online safeguarding. We hope to work closely with parents so as to make sure that young people are safe from harassment both in and out of school.

### **Who to contact if you have been affected by any of the issues in this article**

- [amicus@royallatin.org](mailto:amicus@royallatin.org) is a confidential route to advice and support for anyone who is concerned about peer on peer abuse, in or out of school. Suggestion boxes in student reception offer a route for anonymous testimony and are only read by senior members of staff. The email [safeguarding@royallatin.org](mailto:safeguarding@royallatin.org) allows you to contact the safeguarding team directly with your concerns.
- [SARCs are specialist medical and forensic services](#) for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted.
- [Rape crisis](#) - This National Organisation offers support and counselling for those affected by rape and sexual abuse. Helpline: 0808 802 9999 (12-2.30 & 7-9.30)
- [The joint website of Women Against Rape and Black Women's Rape Action Project](#). Both organisations are based on self-help and provide support, legal information and advocacy.
- [Survivors UK – Male Rape and Sexual Abuse Support](#) - This offers a range of support options specifically for men affected by rape and sexual abuse.