

School-based approaches

1. What do we mean by school-based approaches?

School-based approaches (which cover projects, programmes, interventions and practices) help to reduce violent offending by working with children and young people before problem behaviours become entrenched or escalate. We know that early aggressive behaviour is a risk factor for later violence and criminal behaviour, and that schools provide an excellent opportunity to engage with and support vulnerable young people outside of the home setting.

Many well-evidenced school-based approaches work directly with young people who are already demonstrating signs of problem behaviours such as aggression, violence, disruptive behaviour and weapons carrying, and seek to equip them with the skills, coping strategies or support they need to reduce or mitigate these negative behaviours. School-based approaches may also help to ensure young people remain in mainstream education settings, preventing them from being excluded and becoming more vulnerable to exploitation and further escalation towards criminal behaviour.

School-based approaches often work with young people who have not demonstrated violent behaviour but are still at risk of doing so in the future. These approaches may seek to improve a range of outcomes such as social and emotional skills, behavioural outcomes, cognitive regulation or bullying – outcomes which are predictive of later violent behaviour.

School-based approaches can take many forms, from operating at the whole school level (addressing the school environment, classroom curriculum and beyond) or class level (through delivery of classroom curriculum or training for teachers in classroom management), through to delivery in smaller targeted groups with young people at risk of displaying violent behaviour.

2. What do we know about the effectiveness of school-based approaches aimed at preventing youth violence and offending?

There is a wide body of literature that suggests school-based approaches can, when delivered well and in the appropriate format, have large effects on youth violence-

related outcomes including violence and aggression, and on outcomes that are highly predictive of future violence and offending behaviour. For example:

- **Anti-bullying programmes**, particularly those that adopt a whole school approach, have been shown to decrease bullying and victimisation.
- **Cognitive behavioural therapy** (a talking therapy to help people manage problem thoughts, feelings and behaviours) has been shown to be effective at reducing reoffending rates amongst young people, at improving anger control and interpersonal problem solving.
- **Skills-based approaches** (which are designed to enhance relevant skills in relation to social, emotional and behavioural outcomes), have been shown to be particularly effective at reducing problem behaviours, aggression, anti-social behaviour and violence.

Available evidence suggests that approaches delivered universally (open to all) and those targeted at at-risk young people in mainstream schools can be effective at reducing or preventing problem behaviour. However, school-based approaches targeting alternative provision or classes exclusively for children with academic or behavioural problems have been shown to have much smaller effects.

Activities which have inconclusive or no evidence yet of being effective at improving violence or offending-related outcomes include:

- **After-school clubs** which focus on diversionary activity rather than skills development.
- **Comprehensive or multi-modal approaches** which involve a wide mix of intervention formats, and include parents, school administrators and teachers in their delivery.
- **Police officers in schools**, particularly where they focus on deterrence and enforcing discipline.

3. What do we believe are the key components of effective school-based approaches relevant to the Youth Endowment Fund?

Given the range of school-based approaches that seek to reduce violent behaviour, it is challenging to draw out common features across effective approaches. For

approaches focused on improving young people's social and emotional outcomes (including problem behaviours linked to violence), common characteristics of effective programmes delivered in schools include:

- **Skills focus:** a focus on teaching social skills and appropriate behaviours as alternatives to problematic ones.
- **Interactivity:** Use of interactive teaching methods including role play, games and group work to teach social skills.
- **Structure:** Well-defined goals and use of a coordinated set of activities to achieve objectives.
- **Training and support:** Provision of explicit guidelines to the person delivering the intervention through training and programme manuals.

For approaches directly trying to reduce violence or offending, available evidence suggests that approaches have larger effects when they are:

- Implemented with high consistency to the original design.
- Delivered with a greater frequency of sessions (i.e. so not approaches that only involve a one-off session).

4. What do we think are some of the key challenges, risks and barriers associated with delivering school-based approaches?

Given the wide range of school-based approaches aimed at tackling violence, it is difficult to single out key challenges, risks and barriers. However, school-based approaches need to be capable of working effectively in schools, and with or alongside schoolteachers and staff. Available evidence does suggest that effectively targeting at-risk young people in mainstream school settings is a challenge, especially doing this without grouping together negatively-influencing peers (which risks exacerbating problem behaviours). Managing highly faithful implementation of programmes in schools is a challenge as well.

5. Given the available evidence, what are we particularly looking for in applications received in this area?

We are particularly interested in proposals that:

- Target violence, problem behaviours (including externalising behaviours such as aggression or disruptive behaviour and internalising behaviours such as social anxiety), social and emotional skills.
- Target at-risk young people even if this is as part of a universal (open to all) approach
- Use social skills-based approaches and therapeutic (particularly cognitive behavioural therapy-based) approaches.
- Have designs which are interactive, structured and provide training and support for the adults who will be involved in delivery.

Key sources

EIF (2015) 'What works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime a rapid review of interventions delivered in the UK and abroad.' Available [here](#).

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Wilson, S. J. and Lipsey, M. W. (2007) 'School-Based Interventions for Aggressive and Disruptive Behavior.' *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 33(2), pp. S130–S14