Evaluation of the 'SAFE' (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) Taskforces

RAND Europe, University of Westminster, FFT Education Datalab

Principal investigator: Dr Ana FitzSimons

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Evaluation protocol

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Project title	Evaluation of the 'SAFE' (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) Taskforces
Developer (Institution)	Department for Education
Evaluator (Institution)	RAND Europe, University of Westminster, FFT Education Datalab
Principal investigator(s)	Dr Ana FitzSimons
Protocol author(s)	Dr Ana FitzSimons, Dr Emma Disley, Dr Veruska Oppedisano, Prof Richard Dorsett, Dave Thomson
Study design	Quasi-experimental design: difference-in-differences
Study type	Efficacy trial
Evaluation setting	Selected secondary schools in 10 local authority areas
Target group	Pupils in Years 7 to 9 who are at considered at risk of exclusion or disengagement from education
Number of participants	10 local authority areas are participating in SAFE and the evaluation. A further 12 local authority areas will be included as comparison sites for the evaluation.

	The final number of pupils participating in SAFE and in the evaluation is yet to be determined. By January 2024, 4,451 pupils across 324 schools in the 10 local authority areas in which SAFE operates were recorded as having had referrals to SAFE accepted. The final number of comparison group pupils included in the evaluation will be the same as (if one-to-one matching is employed) or more than (if many-to-one matching is employed) the final number of pupils who participated in SAFE.
Primary outcome and data source	For pupils in years 7-9: Suspensions from school (source: National Pupil Database data) (Endline date: end of Spring term 2025)
Secondary outcomes and data sources	For pupils in years 7-9: Overall absence (source: National Pupil Database data) Unauthorised absence (source: National Pupil Database data) Permanent exclusion from school (source: National Pupil Database data) (Endline date: end of Spring term 2025) At the local authority level: Serious violence offences (source: Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes Open Data Tables) (Endline data: end of the Financial Year 2025)

Protocol version history

Version	Date	Reason for revision

5.0	15.10.24	Response to peer reviewer comments
2.0	17.05.24	Redesign of the impact evaluation based on findings from preliminary analysis and feasibility study, shifting evaluation from LA-level educational and serious violence outcomes to pupil-level educational outcomes and LA-level serious violence outcomes.
1.0 [original]	04.12.23	

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Study rationale and background

The SAFE Taskforces programme has been implemented in a wider context of government concerns about serious youth violence, and increased emphasis on the need for local partnerships to reduce and address violence. In 2021, the Government set out its ambition for reducing serious violence in the Beating Crime Plan.[1] In 2022, the Serious Violence Duty was introduced, and the Home Office published statutory guidance to support organisations and authorities exercising functions in relation to that duty.[2] The statutory guidance is intended to ensure 'relevant services work together to share information and allow them to target their interventions, where possible through existing partnership structures, collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence within their local communities'. It also recognises the 'vital role' that schools play in keeping children safe.

DfE launched the 'SAFE' (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) Taskforces programme in 2022 to prevent young people attending mainstream schools from becoming involved in serious violence, by fostering engagement in education. This was informed by evidence that engagement in education is a protective factor against young people's involvement in violence. More recently, a nationally representative survey by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) found that 16% of children were victims of violence in the past 12 months, and 47% of children had been either a victim or witness (YEF, 2023). While 47% of children reported that violence and the fear of violence impacted their day-to-day lives, schools were commonly perceived as places of safety, with 85% of children reporting that they felt either very or fairly safe at school (YEF, 2023).[3] Further recent research for the Department for Education (DfE) shows that, while 'positive relationships with practitioners can protect against violence [...] limited resources mean that some children and young people don't access the right support in time to prevent violence' (DfE, 2023).[4]

This independent evaluation of the SAFE Taskforces programme seeks to contribute to the evidence base on what works to tackle youth violence. The evaluation includes:

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[1] UK Government. (2021). Beating Crime Plan. Policy Paper. Available here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beating-crime-plan/beating-crime-plan

[2] Home Office. 2022. Serious Violence Duty: Preventing and reducing serious violence. Statutory Guidance for responsible authorities. England and Wales. Available here.

[3] YEF. (2023). Children, violence and vulnerability: The second annual Youth Endowment Fund report into young people's experiences of violence

[4] DfE. (2023). The role of systems of support in serious youth violence: evidence and gaps: Deep Dive

- A mixed methods process evaluation that aims to understand how the SAFE Taskforces programme is delivered and the experiences of those involved. This will provide ongoing formative feedback and summative lessons learnt for policy and practice, with a focus on explaining how and why impact was, or was not, achieved.
- An impact evaluation that aims to estimate the causal effect of SAFE on a range of outcomes for pupils and local authorities. As randomisation of Taskforce areas was not feasible, the impact analysis uses a quasi-experimental, difference-in-differences approach.
- A cost evaluation that describes the costs associated with delivery of SAFE at both the Department for Education (DfE) level and the Taskforce level.

The evaluation is being delivered by a consortium of three organisations: RAND Europe, the University of Westminster (UW) and FFT Education Datalab (FFT).

Intervention

Scope of the SAFE Taskforces programme

In 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) announced a £30 million investment in the SAFE Taskforces programme in 10 local authority areas (LAs).[5] SAFE is a programme led by mainstream schools that brings together school leaders across primary, secondary and alternative provision to work with local partners such as LAs, children's social care, violence reduction units (VRUs) and voluntary sector organisations. These stakeholders meet at regular intervals and work in partnership to commission and coordinate the delivery of evidence-based interventions (such as mentoring and cognitive-behavioural approaches) to support pupils' engagement with education and prevent youth violence.

The programme aims to work with the following cohorts of pupils in Years 7 to 9 of secondary school:

- Pupils who are known to be involved in serious youth violence.
- Pupils who are known to be in close proximity to serious violence within their peer groups, families or neighbourhoods.
- Pupils who are starting to disengage from education (as indicated by attitudinal or behavioural change, or absence, suspension or exclusion from school) and may therefore face increased vulnerability to serious violence.

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[5] DfE. (2021). Targeted support for vulnerable young people in serious violence hotspots. Press release. Available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/targeted-support-for-vulnerable-young-people-in-serious-violence-hotspots

SAFE seeks to achieve the following outcomes for children and young people in the 10 LAs:

- Reduced serious youth violence
- Improved school attendance
- Improved behaviour in school (as measured by suspensions and exclusions in this evaluation)
- Improved social and emotional wellbeing

The SAFE Taskforces programme is being delivered over two phases. Phase 1 (set up) began in January 2022 and ran until September 2022. Phase 2 (delivery) begun in September 2022 and will continue in full until March 2025 (with some SAFE areas continuing delivery up to August 2025).

The 10 SAFE LAs were identified by the DfE as the 'top 10 serious violence hotspots', using hospital admissions data and recorded offences from 2016/17 to 2020/21.[6] The 10 areas that are taking part in the SAFE Taskforces programme are:

- Birmingham
- Bradford
- Haringey
- Lambeth
- Leeds
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Newham
- Sheffield
- Southwark

There are a number of key design principles set out by the DfE which underpin the SAFE Taskforces programme. These include:

- Schools-led and collective decision making.
- A geographically targeted approach that is tailored to the needs of the local area.
- Economies of scale from commissioning shared local services.

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[6] These 10 LAs are also part of the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces (APST) pilot, which aims to embed teams of specialists in 22 alternative provision schools in 'serious violence hotspots' across England: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/APST-Evaluation-Protocol-2023.pdf

- The use of similar interventions for pupils in different schools, but who are within the same area, and may thus be likely to face similar issues.

Premises of the SAFE Taskforces programme

While DfE considered a range of approaches to piloting partnerships addressing local needs relating to serious youth violence, it was considered that SAFE would likely enable an efficient and effective approach. The key premises of the SAFE Taskforces programme are:

- Having representatives of schools, local authorities, Violence Reduction Units/Partnerships and other local services working together to identify and address local needs will enable each to bring their diverse expertise and insights to bear on decisions, which will in turn strengthen local partnerships and improve decision-making effectiveness and local impact.
- Having a dedicated, paid team (including a Project Coordinator and Commissioning Lead) in each local area will provide additional capacity for the coordination of partnership working, commissioning of evidence-based interventions suited to the meeting local needs, and overseeing intervention delivery (while minimising burden on schools).
- Central programme support provided by DfE and taken up by all Taskforces will help strengthen Taskforce skills (for example, commissioning support for Taskforces, provided by an organisation commissioned by DfE, will enable commissioning skills development), and enable cross-Taskforce sharing of knowledge and good practice (for example, holding all-Taskforce meetings and events will enable mutual trouble-shooting, collaboration and sharing of good practice and lessons learned), which will in turn improve local decision-making effectiveness and impact.
- Based on evidence that improving school attendance, behaviour at school, and social and emotional wellbeing can help prevent youth violence, SAFE Taskforces should commission interventions that have moderate or good evidence of impact on youth violence directly, or good evidence of impact on these outcomes.[7]
- School staff are well placed to identify pupil's needs and should therefore be involved in referring pupils to interventions.
- Having a local-area, multi-school focus will enable more pupils to access a broader range of interventions better suited to individual needs (compared to the range provided or commissioned by their school, which may not be suited to some pupils' needs).

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[7] Evidence used to inform DfE guidance to Taskforces was drawn from the YEF Toolkit, available here

Phase 1 (set up)

Establishing SAFE Taskforces

The initial task in SAFE Taskforce areas was to establish the Taskforce composition and structure. DfE guidance on the initial setting up of the SAFE Taskforces included a requirement for three DfE-funded roles to be filled to support Taskforce operations: a Commissioning Lead and a Project Coordinator, required for the duration of the programme, and a Data Analyst, required during set up to support the initial strategic needs assessment. Some Taskforces kept on the Data Analyst post during the delivery phase. Guidance on the composition of the SAFE Taskforce itself recommended that it include representatives from around 10 to 15 local schools, as well as representatives of Violence Reduction Units/Partnerships, Virtual School Heads, LAs, Alternative Provision and other education experts, from which a SAFE Taskforce Chair should be appointed to oversee SAFE Taskforce meetings.

Understanding local area needs

Upon the establishment of a SAFE Taskforce in each of the 10 participating LAs during the first half of 2022, every SAFE Taskforce carried out a strategic needs assessment aimed at acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of the specific needs of the local area. The SAFE Taskforces drew upon a range of data, including from the LA, VRU, Youth Justice Board, schools, and publicly available datasets such as the DfE-Ministry of Justice (MoJ) serious violence data-share.[8] In accordance with guidance provided by DfE to the SAFE Taskforces, these strategic needs assessments sought to identify the characteristics of those children and young people who would benefit the most from targeted interventions, by comprehensively understanding and examining:

- The local serious violence landscape, including the communities most affected by violence.
- The backgrounds of children and young people involved in serious violence.
- The proximity of children and young people to serious violence incidents.
- Educational indicators for children and young people at risk of serious violence.
- The existing service landscape.

Developing local area plans for the delivery of SAFE interventions

To support the SAFE Taskforces in commissioning evidence-informed interventions to meet local need, the DfE developed evidence-informed interventions guidance. This drew upon the

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[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-childrens-social-care-and-offending

YEF's Toolkit – a free online resource which summarises the best available research on different approaches to preventing serious youth violence.[9] The primary aim of the DfE's guidance was to set out the most effective interventions in the YEF Toolkit and provide advice on intervention selection. Utilising a RAGG (red, amber, green, grey) rating system, the guidance included four main intervention categories, which are listed in Table 1.

Incorporating DfE guidance into their planning process and with ongoing support from DfE, each SAFE Taskforce selected the interventions they wanted to be delivered and developed a delivery plan for their area. Ongoing support for SAFE Taskforces during this process included formal training on commissioning provided by a social enterprise commissioned by DfE, the Public Service Transformation Academy (PSTA), as well as one-to-one support and troubleshooting provided directly by DfE. The delivery plans included detailed intervention theories of change outlining how the selected interventions aligned with the target outcomes of the SAFE programme, and the pathways through which these outcomes were expected to be achieved.

Table 1: RAGG rating system used by the DfE to rate interventions in the YEF Toolkit that could be commissioned by SAFE Taskforces

RAG rating	Description	Intervention examples
Green (effective)	Good or moderate quality evidence base showing that the intervention reduces serious youth violence in a context relevant to the SAFE programme.	Mentoring, social skills training, and cognitive behavioural approaches (CBA).
Amber (potentially effective)	Evidence relevant to the SAFE programme is less clear. For example, interventions may show a moderate impact on serious youth violence, but from a limited evidence source. Alternatively, there may be high quality evidence that the intervention is effective at addressing a key indicator for serious youth violence, but not serious violence directly.	After school programmes, sports programmes, detached youth work, tackling exclusions, primary-secondary school transition support, and other interventions which target an indicator for serious violence.

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[9] https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/

Red (negative effect or ineffective)	Evidence the intervention is ineffective or has an adverse impact on preventing serious youth violence.	Boot camps and prison awareness programmes.
Grey (insufficient evidence)	These are interventions for which there is insufficient available evidence of impact on the SAFE Taskforce's target outcomes.	Interventions in this category are not necessarily bad things to do, they simply lack evidence of efficacy. Taskforce may continue with existing grey interventions within their own resources.

Adapted from: Department for Education guidance to SAFE Taskforces 2022

Commissioning SAFE interventions

In line with their delivery plans, SAFE Taskforces commissioned a range of interventions. The commissioned interventions were required by DfE to include at least one intervention with a green RAGG rating (mentoring, social skills training and cognitive behavioural approaches), but were also permitted to include interventions with an amber RAGG rating.

Phase 2 (delivery)

SAFE intervention delivery began from September 2022 (the start of Phase 2), though in some cases interventions were not commissioned in time to begin that September. By April 2023, all SAFE Taskforces had begun intervention delivery.

An overview of the types of interventions that the SAFE Taskforces had commissioned by the Spring of 2023 is provided in Table 2.

Throughout the delivery phase, SAFE Taskforces are expected to provide ongoing leadership and coordination and undertake partnership working to support delivery of work to meet intended programme outcomes, and monitor and assure the quality of interventions and referral processes. They are also expected to review their Strategic Needs Assessment annually (or as required), and to create updated Delivery Plans for each year of delivery.

Table 2: Green and Amber interventions commissioned by SAFE Taskforces in Year 1 of delivery (Spring 2023)

	Green (effective)	Amber (potentially effective)

SAFE Taskforce *	Mentoring	Social skills training	Cognitive behavioural approaches (inc. CBT)	Sports programmes	After school programmes / extra-curricular support	School home support	Teacher training and continuing professional	Speech, language and communication therapy (SLT)	Data sharing hub
A	X		X				X		
B	X	X				X		X	
C	X		X	X					
D	X	X							
E	X	X			X				
F	X	X							X
G	X								
H		X	X					X	
I	X	X	X		X				
J	X	X	X	X	X				

*Taskforces have been anonymized.

Source: Developed by the Study Team based on information provided by the DfE.

The logic model, summarising the above narrative on phases 1 and 2, can be found in Annex 1 of this report.

Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation is the first component of the YEF-funded independent evaluation of the SAFE programme. It is co-led by FFT Education Datalab and the University of Westminster.

Narrative of the development of the impact evaluation design

Originally, the plan for our impact evaluation had two elements:

1. **Conduct a programme-level impact evaluation:** evaluate the impact of the SAFE Taskforces programme as a whole, with a quasi-experimental design (QED) using LA-level data for serious violence outcomes (serious violence offences and hospital admissions for serious violence) and educational outcomes (school attendance, suspensions and exclusions).
2. **Assess the feasibility of conducting an intervention-level impact evaluation:** deliver a feasibility study to assess the feasibility of evaluating the impact of specific types of intervention, with a randomised controlled design or QED using pupil-level data for educational outcomes (school attendance, suspensions and exclusions), post-16 destinations, and social, emotional and behavioural outcomes.

To support the development of our Study Protocol for the programme-level SAFE evaluation, we conducted preliminary analysis to test different QED options for estimating treatment effects and to identify the most suitable comparison group to estimate impact. The options we considered were difference-in-differences; synthetic control and regression discontinuity.

The preliminary analysis used historic (pre-treatment) outcomes and demographic information from administrative data sources to:

- Assess pre-treatment differences in outcomes and demographics between Taskforce LAs and three potential comparison groups: all non-treated LAs; LAs participating in the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces (APST) programme but not SAFE;[10] and non-APST LAs. (The primary challenge in evaluating the overall impact of SAFE Taskforces lies in controlling for differences between SAFE and comparison areas, and so this analysis was useful in informing the selection of the comparison group.)

- Obtain estimates of minimum detectable effect sizes (MDES) for each outcome under each evaluation method. (Another challenge is ensuring the evaluation design enables

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[10] https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/funding/who-we-fund/alternative-provision-specialist-taskforces-apst-department-for-education/

analysis that is sufficiently powered to detect an effect, if one exists, and so this analysis was important to identify whether this would be the case.)

The conclusion was that the strongest evaluation approach for the programme-level evaluation was difference-in-differences, with the non-SAFE APST LAs as the comparison group. However, MDES for all outcomes were above 0.2, indicating that the analysis would be unlikely to detect impact if the effect of the programme on LA-level outcomes was small.

For the intervention-level evaluation, the different methodological options we explored were RCT, difference-in-differences, and matching/re-weighting. An additional challenge here was the need to control for the selection of schools into the programme, and the selection of pupils into the specific interventions.

While an RCT would in theory have been able to control for school- and pupil-level selection, the feasibility study ruled out this methodological option for the intervention-level impact evaluation. There was only one intervention in one Taskforce area for which it would have been technically feasible and acceptable to stakeholders to run an RCT, and the sample sizes for this intervention meant the analysis would be underpowered to detect an effect. We therefore conducted preliminary analysis to understand the feasibility and desirability of two further methodological options: difference-in-differences and matching/re-weighting. Again, we considered pre-treatment differences in outcomes and demographics and MDES.

At the time of conducting the preliminary analysis (April 2023), pupil-level participation data for treated pupils were only available from five Taskforces, hindering the estimation of a model of participation in the intervention for comparison pupils.

The preliminary analysis therefore focused on exploring strategies to control for school-level selection within the programme, utilizing data from schools that had been delivering interventions in the five Taskforce areas for which we had data. Since the analysis relied on a specific subset of schools engaged in the intervention by April 2023, it was underpowered relative to analysis using all schools.

Potential comparison schools were identified through difference-in-differences and matching designs, within SAFE LAs, within non-SAFE APST LAs, and within non-SAFE LAs. The methodological approach identified as most robust was difference-in-differences. No significant advantage in terms of MDES was observed in any particular one of the potential comparison groups. However, the analysis found that the MDES was lower than 0.2 only for absences, and above 1 for all other outcomes.

These findings led to a reconsideration of the impact evaluation design, outlined above in summary above and in further detail below.

Research questions

The impact evaluation seeks to estimate the impact of SAFE on a range of outcomes.

It should be noted that, while SAFE has the overall long-term aim of reducing vulnerability to youth violence, the activities and mechanisms of change through which this outcome is expected to be achieved vary significantly between the different interventions commissioned by SAFE Taskforces. Thus, the central focus of the impact element of this evaluation is not upon testing the efficacy of discrete SAFE interventions or intervention types, but upon testing the efficacy of SAFE as a model for local coordination, commissioning and delivery of evidence-informed interventions to improve educational outcomes and, in the longer-term, address youth violence.

Table 3: Impact evaluation questions

Impact at the individual pupil level	**Impact EQ1 – Primary outcome** **What is the impact of the SAFE Taskforces programme on pupil-level suspensions from school?[11]**
	Impact EQ2 – Secondary outcome What is the impact of the SAFE Taskforces programme on pupil-level overall absences from school?
	Impact EQ3 – Secondary outcome What is the impact of the SAFE Taskforces programme on pupil-level unauthorised absences from school?
	Impact EQ4 – Secondary outcome What is the impact of the SAFE Taskforces programme on pupil-level permanent exclusions from school?

[11] The term 'impact' is understood here as the difference in changes in suspensions from school, as measured by National Pupil Database data, between pupils in the SAFE Taskforce programme and a matched comparison group of pupils, before and after intervention. The term has an equivalent meaning throughout evaluation questions 1 to 4. For evaluation question 5, regarding the impact of the SAFE Taskforces programme on serious violence offences, we mean the difference in changes in serious violence offences, as measured by Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes Open Data Tables, between local authorities participating in SAFE and a matched comparison group of local authorities, before and after intervention.

Impact at the LA level	Impact EQ5 – Secondary outcome What is the impact of the SAFE Taskforces programme on local authority-level serious violence offences?

Design

The evaluation of impact on educational outcomes will use an individual-level analysis, comparing differences in changes in outcomes between pupils participating in the SAFE Taskforces programme and a comparison sample of matched pupils in matched schools in non-SAFE APST areas.

The comparison pupil sample will be selected through a two-step propensity score matching procedure: first, we will match schools participating in SAFE to similar schools in non-SAFE APST areas; second, we will match pupils participating in SAFE to similar pupils within the sample of matched comparison schools (see Analysis section below for further details of the matching process).

The estimation of impact on pupil-level outcomes will be based on a difference-in-differences methodology applied to this sample of treatment pupils and comparison pupils. The analysis will compare the difference in outcomes between treatment and comparison pupils before the interventions start, to the difference in outcomes following the interventions. It will control for differences in pupil- and school-related characteristics (listed in the Analysis section of this Study Protocol).

The evaluation of impact on the serious violence outcome will use an LA-level analysis, comparing differences in changes in outcomes between LAs participating in SAFE and LAs that are participating in APST but not SAFE.

The estimation of impact on LA-level outcomes will be based on a difference-in-differences methodology applied to this sample of SAFE LAs and non-SAFE APST LAs. The analysis will compare the difference in outcomes between treatment and comparison LAs before the interventions start, to the difference in outcomes following the interventions.

To give credible impact estimates, relevant differences between the treatment and comparison groups should be controlled for. It is, however, possible that limitations in the available data mean that unobservable differences (i.e. those on which we cannot gather data) remain uncontrolled for. A simple comparison of outcomes between treatment and comparison groups would then not capture solely the impact of participation in SAFE, but would also partly reflect those unobserved differences. One of the strengths of using the difference-in-differences methodology is that it helps to address this. Its appeal is that

unobserved differences between treatment and comparison groups that are consistent over time can be netted out, thereby controlling for stable unobserved influences on outcomes.

Table 4: Design of the impact evaluation

Design		QED (treatment/comparison group pre/post-test using difference-in-differences methodology)
Unit of analysis		For educational outcomes: pupils For the serious violence outcome: LAs
Number of LAs to be included in the analysis		Treatment group: 10 SAFE LAs Comparison group: 12 non-SAFE APST LAs
Number of schools to be included in the analysis		Treatment group (schools in SAFE LAs): TBC, once all data on participating pupils is available. As of January 2024, there were 324 secondary schools with pupils who had participated in SAFE. Comparison group (schools in non-SAFE APST LAs): TBC, once propensity score matching has been conducted to identify secondary schools for inclusion in the comparison group.
Number of pupils included in the analysis		Treatment group (pupils participating in SAFE): TBC, once all data on participating pupils is available. As of January 2024, there were 4,451 pupils who had referrals to SAFE accepted. Comparison group (matched pupils in matched schools in non-SAFE APST LAs): TBC, once propensity score matching has been conducted to identify pupils for inclusion in the comparison group.
Primary outcome	variable	Suspension from school
	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Number of suspensions per pupil Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, starting from the term in which the treatment pupil had a referral to SAFE accepted and ending at the end of Spring Term 2025. Source: NPD
Secondary outcome(s)	variable(s)	Overall absence from school
	measure(s) (instrument, scale, source)	Rate of overall absence, measured as the percentage of all possible attendance sessions missed due to overall absence

		Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, starting from the term in which the treatment pupil had a referral to SAFE accepted and ending in at the end of Spring Term 2025. Source: NPD
	variable(s)	Unauthorised absence from school
	measure(s) (instrument, scale, source)	Rate of unauthorised absence, measured as the percentage of all possible attendance sessions missed due to unauthorised absence Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, starting from the term in which the treatment pupil had a referral to SAFE accepted and ending in at the end of Spring Term 2025. Source: NPD
	variable	Permanent exclusion from school
	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Number of pupils with permanent exclusions Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, starting from the term in which the treatment pupil had a referral to SAFE accepted and ending at the end of Spring Term 2025 Source: NPD
	variable	Serious violence offences
	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Annual number of offences that fall under the serious violence definition in a year per 10,000 in the whole area population Measured for treatment and comparison areas, yearly, starting the financial year in which SAFE interventions began (2022/23) and ending the financial year 2024/25 Source: Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes Open Data Tables
Baseline for primary outcome	variable	Suspension from school
	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Number of suspensions per pupil Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, for the 12 terms prior to the treatment pupil having a referral to SAFE accepted Source: NPD
	variable	Overall absence from school

Baseline for secondary outcome	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Rate of overall absence, measured as the percentage of all possible attendance sessions missed due to overall absence Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, for the 12 terms prior to the treatment pupil having a referral to SAFE accepted Source: NPD
	variable	Unauthorised absence from school
	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Rate of unauthorised absence, measured as the percentage of all possible attendance sessions missed due to unauthorised absence Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, for the 12 terms prior to the treatment pupil having a referral to SAFE accepted Source: NPD
	variable	Permanent exclusion from school
	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Number of pupils with permanent exclusions Measured for treatment and matched comparison pupils, termly, for the 12 terms prior to the treatment pupil having a referral to SAFE accepted Source: NPD
	variable	Serious violence offences
	measure (instrument, scale, source)	Annual number of offences that fall under the serious violence definition in a year per 10,000 in the whole area population Measured for treatment and comparison areas, yearly, in the four financial years prior to SAFE interventions beginning (2018/19, 1029/20, 2020/21, 2021/22) Source: Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes Open Data Tables

Comparison groups

Comparison groups for LA-level outcomes

The LAs participating in the SAFE programme were selected by the DfE using two measures of serious violence:

- Number of police-recorded serious violence offences in calendar years 2016/17 to 2020/21, measured at the community safety partnership level.
- Number of hospital admissions for assault with a sharp object (all ages) from 2016/17 to 2020/21, measured at lower-tier LA level.

Community safety partnerships are largely (but not exactly) coterminous with lower-tier LAs. For those that were coterminous, percentile scores were calculated for each measure and summed by DfE. The areas with the 10 highest scores – i.e. the highest overall rankings for serious violence – were selected to participate in the SAFE programme.

To select a comparison group of LAs for the outcome measured at the LA level (i.e. serious violence offences), we undertook preliminary analysis (see Appendix A) that assessed the suitability of three options: all LAs not participating in SAFE; LAs participating in the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces (APST) programme but not SAFE; and all LAs not participating in either SAFE or APST.

The APST intervention was piloted by the DfE between November 2021 and August 2023 (and subsequently extended to March 2025). The programme aimed to embed multi-disciplinary teams of specialists to support pupils in 22 alternative provision (AP) schools in the top 22 'serious violence (SV) hotspots' across England. LAs participating in APST and SAFE taskforces were selected on the basis of the same metrics (recorded serious violence offences and hospital admissions for assault with a sharp object), and the 22 APST LAs include all 10 of the SAFE LAs. Table 5 below lists the LAs in which the two programmes are implemented. APST areas in which SAFE is also implemented are in bold.

Rankings – to identify the top 10 'hotspots' for SAFE and the top 22 'hotspots' for APST – were calculated over a different time period. While SAFE used these metrics over a five year period from 2016/17 to 2020/21, APST used metrics on hospital admissions in 2020 and on serious violence offences in 2019.

Our preliminary analysis nonetheless demonstrated that the 12 non-SAFE APST LAs offer the best comparison group, with the most similar parallel trends. That is, pre-intervention trends in our outcomes are more similar between SAFE LAs and non-SAFE APST LAs, than between SAFE LAs and all non-SAFE LAs or all non-APST LAs. We therefore selected the 12 LAs participating in APST but not in SAFE as our comparison group for LA level outcomes.

Table 5: SAFE and APST Local Authorities

SAFE Taskforce Areas	APST Areas
1. Birmingham	1. **Birmingham**

2. Manchester	**2. Manchester**
3. Leeds	**3. Leeds**
4. Sheffield	**4. Sheffield**
5. Liverpool	**5. Liverpool**
6. Newham	**6. Newham**
7. Lambeth	**7. Southwark**
8. Southwark	8. Bristol
9. Bradford	9. Brent
10. Haringey	10. Leicester
	11. Bradford
	12. Salford
	13. Lambeth
	14. Hackney
	15. Croydon
	16. Enfield
	17. Tower Hamlets
	18. Haringey
	19. Doncaster
	20. Nottingham
	21. Sandwell
	22. Ealing

Comparison group for pupil-level outcomes

For pupil-level educational outcomes, we will compare differences in changes in outcomes between pupils participating in SAFE (i.e. pupils who have been referred and accepted into SAFE interventions), and a comparison group of matched pupils in matched schools in non-SAFE APST LAs. The selection of the comparison sample will be achieved through propensity score matching in a two-step procedure.

1. **Matching schools participating in SAFE to schools in non-SAFE APST areas**

2. **Matching pupils participating in the SAFE programme to pupils in the matched comparison schools**

We will run matching exercises for each outcome separately. This means, for example, that the set of comparison schools and pupils used to estimate the impact on absences may not be the same as the set for exclusion.

We considered using propensity score matching for pupils only (that is, identifying similar pupils to SAFE pupils, regardless of LA or school context). However, given differences in educational outcomes between LAs and between schools across England, we concluded it was important to construct a comparison group of similar pupils who also occupied similar LA and school contexts to our treatment sample.

This decision to select a comparison group from within non-SAFE APST areas is informed by the preliminary analysis of LA-level outcomes, which suggests greater similarity in pre-intervention trends between SAFE and non-SAFE APST areas, compared to all non-SAFE areas and all non-APST areas. Further details on the analytical approach to constructing a comparison group of matched pupils in matched schools within these LAs are provided in the Analysis section below.

Participants

Our proposed intervention and comparison sample for the impact evaluation includes:

- Educational outcomes (primary outcome and secondary outcomes):
  - All pupils participating in SAFE interventions up until March 2025; and a comparison group of matched pupils in matched schools in non-SAFE APST areas.
- Serious violence outcome (secondary outcomes):
  - All LAs participating in the SAFE Taskforces programme; and a comparison group of non-SAFE APST LAs.

Pupils participating in SAFE are in Years 7 to 9 in mainstream secondary schools. This includes pupils participating in SAFE interventions in the summer holidays (pupils participating in SAFE interventions in the summer before joining Year 7 are treated as being in Year 7, and so on for Year 8 and 9).

We use an intention-to-treat design, such that all pupils who are referred to and then enrolled onto a SAFE intervention are included in the impact evaluation sample, regardless of whether or not they attended any intervention sessions. (Intention-to-treat designs are preferred by YEF and in this case will enable the evaluation to capture the impact on all intended beneficiaries of the SAFE programme, which is useful for DfE policymakers.)

Minimum detectable effect size (MDES) calculations

MDES for educational outcomes

We present MDES estimates for exclusions, suspensions and absence under different scenarios in Tables 6 and 7 below. Estimates were calculated using PowerUp software.

Based on the number of pupils with referrals into SAFE interventions accepted by January 2024, we calculate MDES assuming an average sample size of 4.6 pupils per year group in three year-groups, resulting in 14 pupils per school. We assume 324 schools are allocated to the treatment arm and 324 to the control arm (which reflects the number of schools with pupils participating in SAFE as of January 2024). We also assume 10 percent school level attrition. (Note that the final pupil sample size will be higher, as it will include pupils with referrals to SAFE accepted between January 2024 and March 2025. Holding all else equal, we would expect a larger sample size to lower the MDES)

Based on 2021/22 NPD data collected and analysed by FFT, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC, i.e. the variation between schools divided by the total variation within and between schools) is less than 0.1 for all outcomes. For these calculations, we present MDES assuming two alternative values of the ICC: one at the higher end (0.07) and one at the lower end (0.02). We also assume alpha=0.05 and power=0.8. We include seven school-level pre-intervention covariates: four ethnic composition groups (White, Black, Asian and others), percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), percentage of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and percentage of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). These are school level covariates, chosen as they were available in our current dataset. As no pupil level covariates are available, we assume the power of level 1 and level 2 covariates is the same (which, given the power of our MDES, we would not expect to make much difference). We present two scenarios under the assumption that the explanatory power of the level 1 and level 2 covariates is 0.1 (in the first row, both tables) and 0.2 (in the second row, both tables). These scenarios all suggest that the evaluation will be well-powered to capture effects, and meet YEF's expectation that impact evaluations should be powered to have an MDES of 0.2 or lower.[12]

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[12] When employing clustered assignment, it is standard practice to cluster standard errors at the level of assignment (Athey and Imbens, 2017; Abadie et al., 2023). The cluster robust variance estimator (CRVE) assumes consistency when the number of clusters approaches infinity. However, as shown by Bertrand et al. (2004), Donald and Lang (2007), and Brewer et al. (2013), the performance of the CRVE declines when this assumption does not hold. A common rule of thumb suggests that the CRVE performs well when the number of clusters is sufficiently large. For example, Angrist and Pischke (2008) indicate that 42 clusters may be sufficient for reliable inference. However, as MacKinnon and Webb (2017) argue, even when this threshold is met, CRVE inference should not be fully trusted, particularly when treated clusters are small in size.

Given that we are working with only 22 APST LAs, clustering residuals at the LA level does not meet the assumptions for consistent inference. Additionally, statistical analysis of DfE data shows that after controlling for pupil- and school-level variation, the LA component of total variance is very small (around 1% of total variance), suggesting little need to cluster at the LA level.

According to Abadie et al. (2023), clustering adjustments are essential when the assignment is correlated within clusters. Even if treatment assignment is at the higher LA level, the actual implementation at the school level creates a natural clustering effect that needs to be addressed. This is why we instead cluster residuals at the school level, where we have a sufficiently larger number of clusters, leading to more reliable and robust results.

Table 6: Estimated MDES for education outcomes

		Scenario 1: 0% attrition, rho=0.07, r12=r22=0.1	Scenario 2: 10% attrition, rho=0.07, r12=r22=0.1	Scenario 3: 0% attrition, rho=0.07, r12=r22=0.2	Scenario 3: 10% attrition, rho=0.07, r12=r22=0.2	Scenario 5: 0% attrition, rho=0.02, r12=r22=0.1	Scenario 6: 10% attrition, rho=0.02, r12=r22=0.1	Scenario 7: 0% attrition, rho=0.02, r12=r22=0.2	Scenario 8: 10% attrition, rho=0.02, r12=r22=0.2
Minimum Detectable Effect Size (MDES)		0.077	0.082	0.073	0.077	0.063	0.066	0.059	0.062
Explanatory power of covariates	level 1 (participant)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
	level 2 (group)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Intracluster correlations (ICCs)	level 2 (schools)	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Alpha		0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Power		0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Average cluster size (if clustered)		14 per school	14 per school	14 per school	14 per school	14 per school	14 per school	14 per school	14 per school

Number of settings	Intervention	324	291	324	291	324	291	324	291
	comparison	324	291	324	291	324	291	324	291
	Total	648	582	648	582	648	582	648	582
Number of pupils	Intervention	4536	4082	4536	4082	4536	4082	4536	4082
	comparison	4536	4082	4536	4082	4536	4082	4536	4082
	total	9072	8164	9072	8164	9072	8164	9072	8164

MDES for the serious violence outcome

We present MDES for serious violence offences in the table below. Our preliminary analysis estimated MDES empirically using observed standard errors from placebo tests on pre-treatment data in a difference-in-differences specification spanning multiple years. We use all SAFE and non-SAFE APST LAs. The number of areas in the intervention group was predetermined at the project's outset and cannot be altered. We express the estimated impact in units of the standard deviation of the outcome among SAFE LAs in the latest available year.

A smaller MDES implies a greater ability to detect small effects and a threshold of 0.2 is sometimes applied when designing trials. While the MDES for serious violence offences based on NPC data is 0.28, in this evaluation there is no scope to reduce the MDES by involving more areas.

It is important to note that the MDES refers to a change in the total population figures, of which pupils in Years 7 to 9 constitute only a small proportion. As measures disaggregated by age group are not provided, any change in serious violence within the target population may be significantly diluted in total population data. Given the MDES and high likelihood of dilution, our evaluation may be unlikely to detect the impact of SAFE on this measure. We nonetheless include it as an exploratory secondary outcome, in line with the objectives of the SAFE programme, and to test whether any changes are observed that may be indicative of an effect.

Table 7: Empirically observed MDES for serious violence offences

Minimum Detectable Effect Size (MDES)
0.28

Outcome measures

Summary of primary and secondary outcomes

Our primary outcome is:

- Suspensions from school

Our secondary outcomes are:

- Overall absence from school
- Unauthorised absence from school

- Permanent exclusions from school
- Serious violence offences

The cut-off date for outcome measurement is the end of the Spring Term 2025 for all education outcomes, and the end of the Financial Year 2024/25 for serious violence offences.

Narrative on the selection of outcome measures

Our original plan was to estimate the impact of SAFE on all of these outcomes at the LA level, using a measure of serious violence as the primary outcome. However, as our preliminary analysis found high MDES for the educational outcomes at the LA level, we took the decision to redesign the impact evaluation in order to estimate impact on educational outcomes at the individual level. Due to data availability, we retained the LA-level approach to the serious violence outcome.

By the time this redesign took place, it was clear from formative process evaluation findings that most SAFE interventions were aiming for impact on educational outcomes, but not necessarily serious violence, within the evaluation period. This is reflected in the SAFE theory of change, which identifies improved school attendance, behaviour in school and social and emotional wellbeing as intended outcomes, and reductions in serious youth violence as a longer-term intended impact. Further, the effect of SAFE on serious violence measured at the LA level is likely to be highly diluted.

We therefore took the decision to treat suspensions as the primary outcome, with other education outcomes and the serious violence outcome as secondary outcomes. This better reflects SAFE's objectives and theory of change outcomes, and should also give the evaluation a better chance of detecting an effect on the primary outcome, if one exists.

While we considered using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as a measure of two intended outcomes for pupils in the SAFE theory of change (behaviour in school, and social and emotional wellbeing), this was not pursued due to considerations of the cost and practicalities of administration.[13] Given the impracticalities of collecting additional data on social and emotional outcomes, we do not include a measure of this in our evaluation.

To measure behaviour in school, we considered relying on data recorded by schools on behaviour incidents. However, as the collection and recording of such data are not consistent across schools, which introduces the risk of variation in data quality and reliability, schools-

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[13] The SDQ measure assesses children and adolescents' psychological well-being and behavioural difficulties. It consists of five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviour. These subscales combine to provide a comprehensive assessment of different aspects of their psychological well-being and behaviour. More information is available here.

recorded data are not straightforwardly comparable. This makes schools-recorded data on behaviour incidents an unreliable option for outcome measurement.

National statistics show that the most common reason for both suspensions and exclusions has consistently been 'persistent disruptive behaviour'.[14] As such, we decided to use suspension and permanent exclusion outcomes as proxies for measuring SAFE's intended outcome of improved behaviour in school. We use overall absence and unauthorised absence from school as secondary outcomes, reflecting the intended outcome of improved school attendance in the SAFE theory of change.

We had initially intended also to include post-16 destinations as a secondary outcome, as it had originally been thought that this could be an intended outcome of the programme. During the re-design, however, this outcome was excluded on the basis that it is not included in the SAFE programme theory of change, and many SAFE interventions are not intended to have an impact on post-16 outcomes. As SAFE pupils are in Years 7 to 9 (i.e. mostly aged 11 to 14), the evaluation might also be unlikely to be able to detect impact on post-16 destinations within the evaluation timeframe, given the relatively small sample of pupils for whom we would be able to assess this outcome. It would, however, be possible to look at this outcome in a future study, using SAFE data in the YEF archive.

Data availability

The NPD data on our education outcomes of interest are released by NPD on a regular schedule.

Data on absence (including all absence and unauthorised absence) for each term in an academic year is released in the March of the following academic year (so, absence data for all terms in the academic year 2024/25 is released in March 2026, and so on).

Data on suspensions and exclusions for the Autumn and Spring terms in an academic year is released in the April of the following academic year, with data for the Summer term released in July of the following year (so, absence data for Autumn and Spring terms in the academic year 2024/2025 is released in April 2026).[15]

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[14] 2024. National Statistics on suspensions and permanent exclusions in England. Available here.

[15] 'Suspensions' were previously known as 'fixed-term exclusions'. These terms are synonymous. The term 'exclusions' now means permanent exclusions.

To measure the impact of SAFE on education outcomes up to and including Spring term 2025 (i.e. the point at which pilot funding for interventions in most SAFE Taskforce areas will be discontinued), we will request NPD data on these outcomes in March and April 2026.

Regarding data availability for our serious violence outcome, Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes Open Data Tables (PRCO) release data on the number of serious violence offences within a financial year, 4 to 9 months after the end of that financial year (so the annual number of serious violence offences in 2024/25 will be available at some time between July and December 2025).

To measure the impact of SAFE on serious violence offences up to and including the financial year 2024/25, we will access PRCO data on this outcome as soon as it becomes available in the latter half of 2025.

Each measure for each outcome is described in detail below.

In addition to these data on outcomes, the evaluation team collects data recorded and compiled by SAFE Taskforces on SAFE pupils, schools and interventions required for the analysis, on a termly basis throughout the programme. This includes data on: Unique Pupil Numbers, pupil names, dates of birth, postcodes, school URN, school LAESTAB, dates of all intervention sessions attended and reasons for ending intervention.

Primary outcome

Suspensions

Measure: Number of suspensions

Definition of the measure: The total number of suspensions recorded in each term for each pupil.

Termly data available from/to: Autumn term in the academic year 2018/19 to Spring term in the academic year 2024/25.

Treatment group: All pupils who have a referral to a SAFE intervention accepted.

Comparison group: Matched pupils of the same age, who are enrolled in matched mainstream schools in matched local authorities at the time intervention begins for their matched treatment group counterpart.

Rationale: Improvement in school behaviour is an outcome identified in the SAFE Taskforces theory of change. As it was infeasible to collect primary data on behaviour through the SDQ, and as 'persistent disruptive behaviour' is the most common reason for suspensions (and exclusions), we are using suspensions as a proxy for behaviour in school.

Secondary outcomes

Individual-level secondary outcomes

Overall absence

Measure: Rate of overall absence

Definition of the measure: The percentage of sessions that are recorded as (authorised and unauthorised) absences in each term for each pupil.

Termly data available from/to: Autumn term in the academic year 2018/19 to Spring term in the academic year 2024/25. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in schools being closed to most pupils in state schools in academic year 2019/20, data for 2019/20 are not available. Data for 2020/21 are also partially affected by national lockdowns. COVID-19 also had an uneven impact on absence in different regions.

Treatment group: All pupils who have a referral to a SAFE intervention accepted.

Comparison group: Matched pupils of the same age, who are enrolled in matched mainstream schools in matched local authorities at the time intervention begins for their matched treatment group counterpart.

Rationale: Improvement in school attendance is an outcome identified in the SAFE Taskforces programme theory of change and overall absence will capture this. While there are concerns about the quality of absence data in NPD due to COVID-19, NPD outcomes for all schools have the benefit of being readily available without incurring additional costs for data collection and can be tested retrospectively.

Unauthorised Absence

Measure: Rate of unauthorised absence

Definition of the measure: The percentage of sessions that are recorded as unauthorised absences in each term for each pupil.

Termly data available from/to: Autumn term in the academic year 2018/19 to Spring term in the academic year 2024/25. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in schools being closed to most pupils in state schools in academic year 2019/20, data for 2019/20 are not available. Data for 2020/21 are also partially affected by national lockdowns. COVID-19 also had an uneven impact on absence in different regions.

Treatment group: All pupils who have a referral to a SAFE intervention accepted.

Comparison group: Matched pupils of the same age, who are enrolled in matched mainstream schools in matched local authorities at the time intervention begins for their matched treatment group counterpart.

Rationale: Improvement in school attendance is an intended outcome in the SAFE theory of change. While overall improvement in school attendance is captured well by our measure of overall absence, we also include unauthorised absence as this is likely to be more sensitive to pupil behaviour than overall absences (which include, for example, authorised absence due to sickness, religious observances or family bereavement). While there are concerns about the quality of absence data in NPD due to COVID-19, NPD outcomes for all schools have the benefit of being readily available without incurring additional costs for data collection and can be tested retrospectively.

Exclusions

Measure: Pupil is permanently excluded

Definition of the measure: Number of permanent exclusions in each term, using a flag (1/0) to indicate pupils with one or more permanent exclusions and pupils with none.

Termly data available from/to: Autumn term in the academic year 2018/19 to Spring term in the academic year 2024/25.

Treatment group: All pupils who have a referral to a SAFE intervention accepted.

Comparison group: Matched pupils of the same age, who are enrolled in matched mainstream schools in matched local authorities at the time intervention begins for their matched treatment group counterpart.

Rationale: Improvement in school behaviour is an outcome identified in the SAFE Taskforces theory of change. As it was infeasible to collect primary data on behaviour through the SDQ, and as 'persistent disruptive behaviour' is the most common reason for exclusions (and suspensions), we are using permanent exclusions as a proxy for behaviour in school.

Local authority-level secondary outcomes

Serious violence offences

Measure: Number of offences that fall under the PRCO definition of serious violence in a year per 10,000 in the population. Age range: all ages.

Definition of the measure: Serious violence offences data are sourced from Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes Open Data Tables.[16] See Table 8 below for a list of offences counted as an incident of serious violence in PRCO data. While we have no control over the offences counted as serious violence in the PRCO, there is a high degree of overlap with the offences included in the definition of serious violence agreed with DfE and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and used by DfE to identify the 10 areas in which to pilot SAFE (though the DfE-MoJ definition is broader and more comprehensive).[17]

Annual data available from/to: Financial years 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25

Population: PRCO data on serious violence offences committed by people of all ages within community safety partnership (CSP) areas are published quarterly, approximately 4-9 months in arrears (e.g. data for January to March 2025 will be published at some time between July and December 2025). While data are reported at community safety partnership (CSP) level, we will aggregate to upper-tier LA level for each financial year.

Rationale: The rationale for including serious violence offences as a secondary outcome is that DfE intended the SAFE Taskforces programme to reduce serious violence and a reduction in serious violence is in the SAFE theory of change as an intended impact. While a reduction in serious violence is expected to be a more distal outcome than educational outcomes, DfE and YEF retain an interest in measuring serious violence as a secondary outcome. The rationale for using recorded serious violence offences is that this was part of the metric used by DfE to identify LAs for inclusion in the SAFE programme, because it captures an important part of serious violence at LA level. There are, however, important limitations to this measure. As the data we will use is taken from public releases by PRCO, we are unable to alter the specification of the measure. In particular, we are unable to look at serious violence offences for only the SAFE treatment and comparison group pupils, or only the age group of interest: the available data describe the number of offences recorded in each area, committed by people of any age whether or not they reside in the area. Thus, any changes in serious violence offending among the SAFE treatment and comparison group pupils may not be visible in the LA-level data, due to dilution. (The DfE-MoJ dataset was also considered as a potential source for data on serious violence offences outcomes. However, the data lag of approximately three years meant this could not provide data on outcomes within the evaluation timeframe.)

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[16] Official statistics: Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables. Available here.

[17] Department for Education. (2023). Education, children's social care and offending: multi-level modelling. Technical report. Available here.

Table 8: List of offences counted as an incident of serious violence in PRCO data

Code	Offence
1	Murder
10A	Possession of firearms with intent
10B	Possession of firearms offences
10C	Possession of other weapons
10D	Possession of article with blade or point
2	Attempted murder
34A	Robbery of business property
34B	Robbery of personal property
3A	Conspiracy to murder
3B	Threats to kill
4.1	Manslaughter
4.2	Infanticide
4.3	Intentional destruction of a viable unborn child
56A	Arson endangering life
59	Threat or possession with intent to commit criminal damage
5D	Assault with intent to cause serious harm (since April 2012)
81	Other firearms offences
90	Other knives offences

Source: Official statistics: Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables. Available here.

Additional variables used in the impact evaluation

A variety of pupil-level measures available in NPD will be included as covariates in the estimates of impact on outcomes, to adjust for differences between treatment and comparison groups. Some of these measures will also be used as variables for school- and pupil-level matching. These are set out in the table below.

Table 9: NPD data used for school- and pupil-level matching, and as control variables

Variables included in school-level matching, and as controls in estimating impact on education outcomes	Variables included in pupil-level matching, and as controls in estimating impact on education outcomes	Variables included in pupil-level matching, but not as controls (as they are outcomes)	Variables included as controls in estimating impact on the serious violence outcome
• Total pupils aged 11-14 in latest available year • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 identifying as white • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 who are female • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) • Percentage of pupils in state-funded education aged 11-14 with special educational needs (SEN) met by an education, health and care (EHC) plan • Percentage of pupils in state-funded education aged 11-14 with SEN not met by an EHC plan • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 with a history of involvement in social care • Mean local authority IDACI score for pupils aged 11-14, latest available year (2019) • Variables summarising mean outcomes for each of the four pre-treatment years • Serious violence at the LA level (sourced from NPC data)	• Month of birth • Age in months • Attainment at Key Stage 2 in reading and maths • Ethnicity • First language (English/ other) • Gender • Percentage of terms eligible for FSM • Age first identified with SEN • Percentage of terms on SEN register • Primary SEN type • Secondary SEN type • Ever in care • Ever in need • IDACI score of home postcode	• Absence rates (calculated for each year from Reception upwards): used in matching for the absences outcomes • Number of suspensions (calculated for each year from Reception upwards): used in matching for the suspensions outcome • Ever excluded (calculated from Reception upwards): used in matching for the exclusions outcome	• LA total population • Total pupils in LA aged 11-14 in latest available year • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 identifying as white in LA • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 who are female in LA • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) in LA • Percentage of pupils in state-funded education aged 11-14 with special educational needs (SEN) met by an education, health and care (EHC) plan in LA • Percentage of pupils in state-funded education aged 11-14 with SEN not met by an EHC plan in LA • Percentage of pupils aged 11-14 with a history of involvement in social care in LA • Mean local authority IDACI score for pupils aged 11-14 in LA, latest available year (2019)

Analysis: difference-in-differences

Our analysis will use difference-in-differences to estimate impact on outcomes. This methodology relies on the assumption that differences in outcome changes between the treatment group and the comparison group are due to the intervention. The idea is that the comparison group can capture the expected change in mean outcomes in the absence of the treatment, so netting this from change seen in the treatment group allows the impact of treatment itself to be identified.

For this to be credible, trends in the comparison group would need to have applied to the treatment group, had the treatment not occurred. In turn, in order for it to be credible that outcome trends (after the time at which treatment started) in the treatment group would have looked similar to comparison group had treatment not occurred, there need to be similar trends in the outcomes of interest in the two groups before the start of treatment.

Educational outcomes

For educational outcomes, we will conduct an individual-level analysis, comparing differences in changes in outcomes between pupils participating in SAFE and a comparison sample of matched pupils in matched schools in non-SAFE APST LAs. The selection of the comparison sample will be achieved through propensity score matching in a two-step procedure. First, matching schools participating in SAFE to schools in non-SAFE APST areas; and second, matching pupils participating in the SAFE programme to pupils in the matched comparison schools. We will run matching exercises for each outcome separately, using the past values of the outcome of interest (but not the past values of the other education outcomes), and other variables as set out in Table 9, for matching.[18] This means, for example, that the set of comparison pupils used to estimate the impact on absences may not be the same as the set for exclusion.

Selection of pupils into SAFE interventions depends on the referral decisions of those making referrals and other professionals involved in screening and accepting or rejecting referrals, as well as on pupils' individual decisions about whether to accept the referral. As such, pupil-level selection is likely to be shaped by unobserved factors such as pupils' and professionals' attitudes and beliefs, pupils' relationships with professionals and peers, and behaviour inside and outside school, which are not recorded in the NPD. Consequently, attempts to control for

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[18] We will not include past values of all four education outcomes of interest in the matching process, in order to avoid constraining the sample by requiring parallel trends across all outcomes.

pupil-level selection through variables that are observable in the NPD are unlikely to be fully successful.

To mitigate self-selection issues related to school-level and pupil-level selection, our estimation strategy leverages the repeat observation of educational outcomes. We include school-level and pupil-level fixed effects in the regression analysis, accounting for time-invariant unobservable characteristics that may be correlated with the outcomes of interest. (A remaining limitation of this strategy is that time-varying school-level and pupil-level unobservable characteristics that may be correlated with participation in the intervention may bias the estimated impact.)

The variables we will include in school- and pupil-level matching and as controls in estimating impact on education and serious violence outcomes are set out in Table 9 above.

To address the variability in the timing of the intervention for participating pupils in SAFE schools throughout the academic year, matching will also control for the interaction between the treatment indicator, academic year, and the term when the pupil initiates the programme. This approach defines a comparator pupil sample for each term in the academic year, reflecting the diverse timing of intervention delivery for pupils in the same school.

We will use a weighting approach to adjust for imbalances between the sample of treatment and comparison pupils, that allows us to more tightly control for differences between SAFE and non-SAFE pupils.

To estimate impacts, we will estimate the following equation on the sample of pupils participating in SAFE and their matched comparator:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SAFE_{ist} + \beta_3 X_{st} + \beta_4 X_{it} + \sigma_s + \pi_i + \tau_t + u_{ist}$$

Where Y_{ist} is the individual level education outcome measured in term t of pupil i in school s. $SAFE_{ist}$ is an indicator that turns to one for a pupil whose referral to the SAFE intervention has been accepted in term t, and zero otherwise. Once the SAFE indicator turns to one, it remains at one for subsequent terms. β_1 is the coefficient of interest. The regression will control for school-level, pupil-level and term-level fixed effects. All variables used for matching will be used as controls, except for the past values of outcomes of interest, as they are outcomes in the difference-in-differences specification. The software used to run the model is Stata. The coefficient on the SAFE treatment indicator will represent the estimated intention to treat. Parallel pre-intervention trends in the educational outcomes will be assessed between treated and matched comparison samples.

The baseline period will cover the 12 terms prior to intervention. We will examine pupils' outcomes each term up to Spring term of the academic year 2024/25. This means that the number of terms included in the 'follow-up' period varies between pupils.

Serious violence outcome

For serious violence, we will run an LA-level analysis, comparing differences in changes in outcomes between SAFE LAs and a comparison sample of non-SAFE APST LAs. Our preliminary analysis examined pre-intervention trends in serious violence outcomes in the seven years prior to SAFE interventions beginning (from 2014/15 to 2021/22). This found that pre-intervention trends looked more parallel between SAFE LAs and non-SAFE APST LAs, than between SAFE LAs and all non-SAFE LAs or all non-APST LAs.

We will use an LA-level estimation dataset containing baseline data for (at least) four years prior to SAFE intervention beginning (from 2018/19 to 2021/22), and follow up data for the duration of the SAFE Taskforces programme (from 2022/23 to 2024/25). Imbalance between LAs in pupil populations and LA characteristics will be explicitly controlled for using the set of covariates that can be associated with outcomes (listed above in Table 9).

To estimate impacts, we will estimate the following equation:

$$Y_{lt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SAFE_{lt} * POST_t + \beta_2 SAFE_{lt} + \beta_3 POST_t + \beta_4 X_{lt} + u_{ist}$$

We will regress the LA level outcome in period t on a 0/1 indicator for SAFE being available in the LA in the post intervention period. $SAFE_{lt}$ is an indicator that turns to one for an LA receiving the SAFE intervention in year t, and zero otherwise.

As the analysis is performed at the LA level, residuals will not be clustered at that level. The software used to run the model is Stata.

The coefficient on the SAFE indicator will represent the estimated treatment effect, on an 'intention to treat' basis.

Robustness checks

For educational outcomes, we plan to estimate placebo treatment effects in the year prior to the intervention. We expect the placebo test to produce null treatment effects showing lack of pre-intervention differences between treated and comparison LAs.

For serious violence offences, using difference-in-differences with non-SAFE APST LAs as a comparison group provides an estimate of the impact of SAFE and APST (as APST is also implemented in SAFE LAs) relative to APST only. Estimates of SAFE's impact on this outcome

may therefore be confounded by the APST programme, if APST has an impact on LA-level serious violence within the SAFE evaluation period.

We therefore plan, as a robustness check for the serious violence outcome, to apply a difference-in-differences estimator that uses all non-APST LAs (of which there are 130) as a comparison group. This allows us to estimate the impact of SAFE relative to no other intervention.

Clearly, a 'failed' robustness check would sound a note of caution for our results. Depending on the nature of the finding, it may be a challenge to reconcile results fully. Should impact estimates using the 130 non-APST LAs as comparators be higher (or lower) than those using the 12 non-SAFE APST LAs as comparators, this would imply that the impact of APST is positive (or negative) relative to the impact of SAFE.

For the LA-level serious violence outcome, we will also provide alternative estimates that take account of the staggered roll-out of the intervention across LAs using a staggered difference-in-differences specification. This is to assess whether the main difference-in-differences estimates are robust to the timing of roll-out.

We note that there are limitations to our ability to test parallel pre-treatment trends, because these tests may have low power in detecting statistically significant pre-treatment trends, and sample bias in the treatment group can create selection bias from only analysing cases with insignificant pre-trends. Rambachan and Roth, (2023) propose a sensitivity test to present robust inference in settings where the parallel trends assumption may not hold. We will therefore perform these tests in the difference-in-differences analysis.

Subgroup analyses

We will produce sub-group analyses for the primary outcome using our main specification. We will interact the treatment effect with the following variables:

- Ethnicity (using the available categories of 'White', 'Black', 'Asian', and 'Other')
- Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) score above/below the median in the sample
- Academic year in which referral was accepted (2022/23, 2023/34, and 2024/25)

The statistical power of these sub-group analyses will likely be lower than when considering full sample impact estimates and will thus be considered exploratory. Consequently, we only propose to use the broad groupings listed above.

We considered also conducting sub-group analyses on the basis of which intervention type pupils accessed (e.g. mentoring, cognitive behavioural approaches or social skills). However,

we know from formative process evaluation findings that individual interventions of the same broad type are highly variable. For example, mentoring interventions vary in terms of referral criteria, length of intervention and setting. This lack of comparability between interventions of the same type would undermine the usefulness of any sub-group analysis using intervention types. Further, we are unable to assess heterogeneity of impact according to intervention type as we cannot control for selection into each specific intervention. Impact estimates would therefore likely be biased and uninformative. As part of our process evaluation, however, we will provide descriptive statistics on how many pupils accessed each type of intervention.

Finally, we considered the possibility of presenting estimates of impact on pupils by dosage of the intervention (i.e. low versus high exposure to the intervention, or no/few versus many intervention sessions attended by pupils). Similarly, however, we excluded this as we cannot control for selection into high versus low dosage. As part of our process evaluation, we will provide descriptive statistics on how many pupils included in the impact evaluation did not attend any intervention sessions.

Treatment effects in the presence of non-compliance

For our estimation of impact on pupil-level outcomes, we are able to include in the impact evaluation only those pupils who were referred to SAFE and had their referral accepted. In line with our intention-to-treat approach, and given that we cannot control for selection into high versus low dosage, we treat these pupils as treated, regardless of whether they attended any intervention sessions. As we do not have data for pupils who are offered SAFE but decline it prior to being referred, we cannot account for this non-compliance and these pupils are excluded from our analysis. At the pupil level, then, full compliance will be granted to all pupils who have had their referrals to SAFE accepted, whether or not they attended intervention sessions. We will provide descriptive statistics setting out how many pupils included in the impact evaluation did not attend any intervention sessions.

For our estimation of impact on LA-level outcomes, we know the 10 SAFE Taskforces began delivering interventions at different times during Year 1 of implementation (2022/23). By the beginning of Year 2 (the start of the academic year 2023/24), however, all SAFE Taskforce areas had started delivery of at least one SAFE intervention. For the first year of the intervention, we control for non-compliance by considering SAFE Taskforces that have not started delivery of any SAFE interventions as part of the comparison group. LAs are treated as compliant from the point at which they began delivery of at least one SAFE intervention. (This means that full compliance at the LA level is granted for Years 2 and 3 of delivery).

Missing data

As the analysis will utilise administrative data sources for primary and secondary outcomes and relevant covariates, we expect attrition to be low. We know, however, that administrative datasets can contain missing data, and on the basis of previous experience expect some data to be missing in the NPD.

Further, as noted above in the section on outcome measures, NPD data on absence are not available for the year 2019/20, and are incomplete for the year 2020/21, due to schools being closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effect size calculation

The effect size for each outcome is the difference-in-differences estimate of the treatment effect divided by the population standard deviation in the outcome for all pre-treatment years (i.e. years unaffected by the treatment) in the dataset combined.

$$\text{ES} = \frac{Treatment\ eff}{\sigma_{pre}}$$

The lower and upper confidence intervals for each treatment effect will also be divided by the population standard deviation to calculate confidence intervals for the effect size. For binary outcomes, risk ratios will also be presented.

Implementation and process evaluation

The implementation and process evaluation (IPE) is the second component of the independent evaluation funded by the YEF. It is led by RAND Europe.

Our mixed-methods IPE aims to understand the set up and delivery of the SAFE Taskforce programme, and perceptions of its outcomes.

We have organised IPE data collection into five stages, or 'Dives', reflecting the five stages of SAFE Taskforce programme implementation. Following each Dive, we will provide formative feedback based on the findings from that Dive. We will also report summative findings in our final evaluation report (to be completed by August 2026).

The table below sets out the five programme stages, along with the corresponding evaluation Phases and Dives, the intended timing of these, and the timing of formative feedback for each Dive.

Table 10: Timing of project stages and corresponding evaluation Phases, Dives and formative feedback briefings

Programme stage	Evaluation Phase	Evaluation Dive	Intended timing of stage/Dive	Timing of formative feedback
Establishing SAFE Taskforces	1	1	January 2022 – April 2022	May 2022
Initial SAFE Taskforce planning	1	2	May 2022 – August 2022	October 2022
Year 1 of delivery	2	3	September 2022 – August 2023	January 2024
Year 2 of delivery	2	4	September 2023 – August 2024	September 2024
Year 3 of delivery	2	5	September 2024 – March 2025	September 2025

We note that some aspects of the programme intended to take place in the 'Initial SAFE Taskforce planning' and 'Year 1 of delivery' phases were delayed (for example, some SAFE Taskforces had not completed commissioning of SAFE interventions in the 'Initial SAFE Taskforce planning' stage, in time to begin delivery at the start of the 'Year 1 of delivery' stage). The evaluation team responded flexibly to these delays, shifting the timing of some data collection activities in order to capture learning on the delayed activities. In particular, some Dive 3 methods were delayed until autumn 2023, in order to capture learning from a longer period of intervention delivery. Correspondingly, the formative feedback from this Dive took place in January 2024 (rather than September 2023 as originally intended).

Research questions

The implementation and process evaluation addresses two sets of questions: one set regarding the set up phase (from January 2022 to September 2022), and one set regarding the delivery phase (from September 2022 to March 2025). The questions address a range of themes, indicated in bold below.

Research questions for Phase 1 (set up)

Establishing the SAFE Taskforces

EQ1. How are SAFE Taskforces set up, and to what extent do they have appropriate membership, structures and processes?

EQ2. To what extent are SAFE Taskforces ready to begin commissioning and operation at the end of the set-up phase?

Strategic Needs Assessments

EQ3. How are Strategic Needs Assessments undertaken, and to what extent are they evidence-informed, joined-up and in line with DfE guidance?

Delivery plans

EQ4. How are Delivery Plans developed, and to what extent are they evidence-informed, joined-up and in line with DfE guidance and Strategic Needs Assessments?

DfE guidance and support

EQ5. How do Taskforces make use of the DfE guidance, support, and analysis offered to them during the set-up phase, and to what extent is this relevant, accessible, actionable, evidence-based and timely?

Research questions for Phase 2 (delivery)

This set of 'working' research questions for Phase 2 are particularly detailed, to support systematic data collection and analysis across data collection Dives. We expect, however, to refine these into a more streamlined set of questions in the final report.

Operation of the Taskforces

EQ6. How and to what extent do SAFE Taskforces provide leadership to, coordinate between and work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders from schools and key local organisations?

EQ7. To what extent, and why, are there changes to SAFE Taskforce membership, leadership, structure and processes during the delivery phase?

> EQ7.1. To what extent do these changes support or hinder the operation of SAFE Taskforces?

EQ8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of leadership, coordination and partnership working by SAFE Taskforces?

EQ8.1. What supports or hinders SAFE Taskforce leadership, partnership working and coordination?

EQ9. What is the approach to reviewing and updating Strategic Needs Assessments and Delivery Plans?

EQ10. To what extent are updated Strategic Needs Assessments and Delivery Plans evidence-informed, joined-up, in line with DfE guidance and useful to Taskforces?

Commissioning interventions

EQ11. What approach is taken by SAFE Taskforces to identifying, selecting and commissioning interventions?

EQ11.1. What support for commissioning is provided by the Public Service Transformation Academy (PSTA, an organisation commissioned by the DfE)?

EQ12. To what extent (and why) is the approach to commissioning interventions consistent with Strategic Needs Assessments and Delivery Plans?

EQ13. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the commissioning process?

EQ13.1 What supports or hinders the commissioning process?

Referral processes

EQ14. How are appropriate young people identified and referred to SAFE interventions?

EQ15. To what extent are referral processes effective in ensuring appropriate young people are referred to SAFE interventions?

EQ15.1. What supports or hinders referrals to SAFE interventions?

Implementation and delivery of SAFE interventions

EQ16. What SAFE interventions are delivered to pupils?

EQ16.1. Are SAFE intervention types in line with DfE guidance?

EQ16.2. Who delivers SAFE interventions?

EQ17. To what extent are SAFE interventions delivered as planned and with fidelity?

EQ18. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the SAFE interventions delivered?

EQ18.1. What supports or hinders the delivery of SAFE interventions?

Monitoring and quality assurance

EQ19. How do SAFE Taskforces monitor and assure quality and fidelity of interventions and referral processes?

EQ20. To what extent is the assurance of quality and fidelity undertaken by SAFE Taskforces effective?

EQ20.1. What supports or hinders the assurance of quality and fidelity by SAFE Taskforces?

DfE guidance and support

EQ21. What is the scope and content of the guidance, support and analysis provided to SAFE Taskforces by the DfE during the delivery phase?

EQ22. To what extent was DfE guidance, support and analysis for SAFE Taskforces during the delivery phase relevant, accessible, actionable, evidence-based and timely?

EQ22.1. To what extent, and how, do SAFE Taskforces make use of DfE guidance, support and analysis?

EQ22.2. What supports or hinders the use of DfE guidance, support and analysis by SAFE Taskforces?

Collaboration between SAFE Taskforces

EQ23. How and to what extent do SAFE Taskforces communicate and collaborate with each other?

EQ24. To what extent is communication, collaboration, and sharing of good practices and knowledge between SAFE Taskforces effective?

EQ24.1. What supports or hinders communication and collaboration between SAFE Taskforces?

Programme outcomes and impacts

EQ25. To what extent are the intended SAFE Taskforce programme outcomes and impacts achieved?

EQ26. What were the key mechanisms through which SAFE Taskforces contributed to outcomes and impacts?

> EQ26.1. What supported or hindered the achievement of outcomes and impacts?

Unintended consequences

EQ27. To what extent do Taskforces result in unintended consequences?

Research methods

Overview of IPE methods and key informant groups

Our evaluation methods include:

- Observations of meetings and events
- Review of programme documentation and data from DfE and SAFE Taskforces
- Interviews with key informants (i.e. one-to-one interviews)
- Dyad interviews with key informants (i.e. interviews with two interviewees)
- Focus group discussions with key informants
- Online surveys with key informants

Our key informant groups include:

- DfE stakeholders from within the SAFE Delivery Team, Policy Team, Serious Violence Research and Analysis Team and Project Management Office
- SAFE Taskforce Project Coordinators (PCs) and Commissioning Leads (CLs)
- SAFE Taskforce members with named roles (including PCs, CLs, and also Strategic Leads, Finance Leads and Data Analysts)
- SAFE Taskforce wider membership (including members with named roles, such as Chairs, and other members from schools, Violence Reduction Units and Partnerships, local authorities, children's social care and police)
- SAFE school stakeholders (whose pupils access SAFE interventions)
- SAFE intervention providers
- Wider stakeholders in SAFE Taskforces areas (namely stakeholders from Violence Reduction Units and Partnerships and local authorities)
- Public Service Transformation Academy (PSTA, an organisation commissioned by DfE to provide SAFE Taskforces with commissioning support) stakeholders

In the table below, we set out the data collection methods we use with each participant group and data source, sample sizes, the timing of data collection, and the rationale for including each method. For methods already completed, we provide the achieved sample size; for methods scheduled to take place in upcoming Dives (i.e. Dives 4 and 5), we provide the target sample size.

Table 11: IPE methods overview

Data collection methods	Achieved / target sample size	Timing of data collection	Rationale
Data source: SAFE Taskforce and SAFE Taskforce-DfE meetings and events			
Observation of meetings and events	N=32 in Dive 1 N=20 in Dive 2 N=up to 41 per year in Dives 3, 4 and 5	Dives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE, including partnership working, enablers and challenges for the programme, and perceived outcomes
Data source: Programme documentation and data from DfE and SAFE Taskforces			
Collection of programme documentation and data from DfE and SAFE Taskforces	N/A	Dives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from information in key documents such as Strategic Needs Assessments, Delivery Plans and intervention trackers for each of the 10 SAFE Taskforce areas
Participants: DfE stakeholders			
Interviews	N=1-4 per Dive	Dives 1, 4 and 5	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from a strategic government perspective
Participants: Public Service Transformation Academy (PSTA)			
Focus group discussion	N=4	Dive 2	To understand the commissioning support for SAFE Taskforces provided by an organisation

			commissioned by DfE, from the perspective of those delivering it
Participants: SAFE Taskforce wider membership			
Interviews	N=21 (across 10 SAFE areas)	Dive 1	To understand the initial set up and implementation of SAFE from the perspective of members with named roles such as Project Coordinators, Commissioning Leads, Strategic Leads, Finance Leads and Data Analysts, and members from schools, Violence Reduction Units, children's social care and police, in each of the 10 SAFE Taskforce areas. Also to inform the planning and design of subsequent data collection
Surveys	N=all members (across 10 SAFE areas)	Dives 4 and 5	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from the perspective of members, including partnership working, enablers and challenges for the programme, and perceived outcomes
Participants: SAFE Taskforce with named roles			
Focus group discussions	N=10 (1 per SAFE area)	Dive 2	To understand the initial set up and implementation of SAFE from the perspective of members with named roles such as Project Coordinators, Commissioning Leads, Strategic Leads, Finance Leads and Data Analysts, in each of the 10 SAFE Taskforce areas
Survey	N=34 (across 10 SAFE areas)	Dive 2	To understand the initial set up and implementation of SAFE from the perspective of members with named roles such as Project Coordinators, Commissioning Leads, Strategic Leads, Finance Leads and Data Analysts, in each of the 10 SAFE Taskforce areas
Participants: SAFE Taskforce Project Coordinators and Commissioning Leads			
Dyad interviews	N=10 per Dive	Dives 3, 4 and 5	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from the perspective of key personnel, including partnership working, enablers and

	i.e. N=20 personnel per Dive (2 per SAFE area)		challenges for the programme, and perceived outcomes
Surveys	N=13 (across 9 SAFE areas)	Dive 3	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from the perspective of key personnel, including partnership working, commissioning, monitoring and quality assuring interventions, enablers and challenges for the programme, and perceived outcomes
Participants: SAFE schools with pupils accessing interventions			
Surveys	N=all eligible schools (across 10 SAFE areas)	Dives 3, 4 and 5	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from a school's perspective, including partnership working, enablers and challenges for the programme, and perceived outcomes
Interviews	N=10 per Dive (across 10 SAFE areas)	Dives 4 and 5	To understand experiences of engaging with the SAFE Taskforces programme (e.g. supporting referrals and facilitating monitoring and quality assurance) and perceptions of outcomes for pupils
Participants: SAFE intervention providers			
Interviews	N=23 (across 9 SAFE areas)	Dive 3	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from an intervention provider perspective, and to inform the design of the survey for this participant group
Surveys	N=all eligible providers (across 10 SAFE areas)	Dives 3, 4 and 5	To understand the implementation and operation of SAFE from an intervention provider perspective, including partnership working, enablers and challenges for the programme, and perceived outcomes
Participants: Wider stakeholders in SAFE Taskforce areas			

Interviews	N=10 per Dive (across 10 SAFE areas)	Dives 4 and 5	To understand SAFE's operating environment and to identify perceptions of SAFE including any consequences for the local area

Data collection processes

The evaluation team has created a bespoke evaluation grid for the SAFE Taskforces evaluation, which maps out our evaluation questions, SAFE programme theory of change components and cross-cutting themes. Experienced researchers in the evaluation team use this to develop data collection tools with questions and prompts that are closely linked to the evaluation questions. Our data collection tools include the following:

- Interview topic guides
- Focus group discussion topic guides
- Survey instruments
- Observation notes template
- Documentation data extraction template

All our topic guides and survey questions are shared with DfE and YEF for review and comment before the wording of questions and prompts is finalised. These tools also undergo RAND Europe's quality assurance processes, which involve the named 'continuous quality reviewer' for the SAFE evaluation reviewing the tools for quality. For online surveys, a dummy version of the survey is created and undergoes further internal testing. This involves a staff member of RAND Europe who is not in the SAFE evaluation team reviewing and completing the dummy online survey, to check online functionality of the survey, assess accuracy and clarity of language, identify any final amendments required, and time how long survey completion takes so that we can inform survey invitees.

Interviews and focus group discussions are led by researchers with extensive research and fieldwork experience. They are supported by research assistants who organise and (with participants' permission) audio record the discussions. Data are recorded in writing using bespoke templates, which are then used for analysis (see below).

Observations of meetings and events

Throughout the whole evaluation period, we will observe Taskforce meetings. In Dives 1 and 2, this was to understand how Taskforces were drawn together and initial implementation processes, experiences and issues. From Dive 3, observations are conducted to understand ongoing operation, including partnership working and enablers and challenges. We liaise with

the DfE delivery team and SAFE Taskforces directly to facilitate invitations to observe meetings.

We also observe meetings between the Taskforces and the DfE in order to understand how Taskforces are working together in each of the ten areas, how they are making use of inputs and to gather more information about implementation and operation. The DfE delivery team invites the evaluation team to relevant meetings.

We use an observation notes template to record and organise data relevant to our evaluation questions, and other emerging themes and learning.

Review of programme documentation and data from DfE and SAFE Taskforces

Throughout the whole evaluation period, we will collect and review SAFE Taskforces programme documentation and data created and provided to us by SAFE Taskforces, DfE and YEF. In Dive 1, these included a range of inputs, such as the YEF Toolkit of evidence-based interventions for reducing serious youth violence and DfE guidance for commissioning. From Dive 2 onwards, we have reviewed outputs such as Strategic Needs Assessments and Delivery Plans. Data from these documents enables us to build understanding of programme plans and contexts, as well as of inputs, outputs activities relevant to testing the theory of change. We use documentation data extraction template to record and organise information relevant to our evaluation questions, and other emerging themes and learning.

The document review has also been used to inform the design of data collection tools (e.g. interview and focus group discussion topic guides).

We also continue to review relevant policy throughout the evaluation in order to understand national priorities, strategies, and programmes that are relevant to young people engaged in or at risk of serious violence, and to SAFE activities and intended outcomes.

One-to-one interviews with key informants

Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews are held with a range of key informant groups.

Interviews with DfE SAFE Taskforce leads in Dives 1, 4 and 5 are intended to provide the evaluation team with insight into the strategic government perspective of the programme as a whole, including not only implementation, common issues and lessons from across the 10 SAFE Taskforce areas, but also the policy and strategic relevance of the programme. In addition, Dive 1 interviews focused on the rationale and intentions for the programme, while Dive 4 and 5 interviews will explore reflections on achievements.

Interviews with the SAFE Taskforce wider membership (including not only those with named roles but also members from schools, Violence Reduction Units, children's social care and

police) were held in Dive 1 to understand early experiences of the initial set up and implementation of SAFE across this broad group of members. These interviews also enabled us to explore members' views and preferences regarding the design and feasibility of evaluation approaches, which informed the planning of methods and design of subsequent data collection tools.

While engagement with SAFE intervention providers was not included in our original evaluation plan, learning from Dives 1 and 2 demonstrated that such engagement would enhance our ability to build a comprehensive understanding of the SAFE Taskforces programme. Interviews with a sample of up to three intervention providers in each of the 10 SAFE Taskforce areas were therefore added to our Dive 3 methods. These explored intervention providers' views and experiences of working with SAFE Taskforces, commissioning, referrals, interventions and delivery issues, and perceived outcomes. Our learning from these interviews also enabled us to design an effective survey tool for use with this key informant group in Dives 3, 4 and 5 (see surveys subsection below).

In Dives 4 and 5, we plan to conduct interviews with SAFE school stakeholders whose pupils access SAFE interventions. This informant group will provide insight into schools' experiences of engaging with SAFE Taskforces, including facilitating referrals and monitoring and quality assurance by Taskforces (which often involve school visits). They will also be asked to provide perspectives on whether engagement in SAFE interventions has made any difference for pupils.

In Dives 4 and 5, we plan to conduct interviews with wider stakeholders from Violence Reduction Units and Partnerships and from local authorities in SAFE Taskforce areas. The purpose of these will be to understand the programme's operating environment and to identify perceptions of SAFE, including any intended or unintended consequences for the local area (such as, e.g., effects on the availability of interventions for pupils not participating in SAFE). While our original evaluation plan set out an intention to consult with these stakeholders mainly via surveys, on reflection and based on learning from the evaluation so far, we suggest interview discussions would be a more effective method through which to elicit these external views and insights. This is because interviews enable broad questions to be asked (about, e.g., unintended consequences for the local area, which may be difficult to anticipate), and then specific answers to be followed up on and explored in further detail.

Focus group discussions/dyad interviews with key informants

Focus group discussions are conducted with a range of key informant groups.

To support SAFE Taskforces with intervention commissioning, the DfE commissioned PSTA to provide thematic workshops, action learning sets and coaching. While engagement with

stakeholders from PSTA was not included in our original evaluation plan, a focus group discussion was held with them in Dive 2 to understand more about the support delivered, and their views and experiences of responding to the needs and issues faced by SAFE Taskforces.

A focus group discussion with SAFE Taskforce members with named roles was also held in each SAFE Taskforce area, to explore their experiences of work in the first two stages of the programme ('establishing the SAFE Taskforces' and 'initial SAFE Taskforce planning'). Discussions explored membership, structures and processes, as well as experiences of developing Strategic Needs Assessments and Delivery Plans, DfE and PSTA support, and overall readiness to begin SAFE intervention delivery.

In Dive 3, a dyad interview was held in each SAFE Taskforce area with Project Coordinators and Commissioning Leads only. The original evaluation plan set out our intention to hold focus group discussions with all members with named roles in each SAFE Taskforce area. However, based on learning from previous Dives, these members of the core project team were viewed by the evaluation team as being most likely to have the greatest insight into the issues the discussions were intended to explore: operation of the SAFE Taskforce, commissioning interventions, referral processes, implementation and delivery of interventions, DfE guidance and support, collaboration between SAFE Taskforces, and perceptions of programme outcomes and impacts. Dyad interviews also bring the advantage of enabling depth and detail of discussion, while still allowing for juxtaposition and comparison of perspectives and insights.

This approach worked well and the evaluation team therefore proposes to engage these same stakeholders in focus group discussions in Dives 4 and 5 (i.e. Project Coordinators and Commissioning Leads only, rather than all members with names roles as set out in our original evaluation plan).

Online surveys with key informants

Online surveys are conducted with a range of key informant groups.

These surveys are intended to gather programme-wide data from as many participants within each key informant group as possible, in each of the 10 SAFE Taskforce areas. This will provide findings and lessons on the programme as a whole, including common enablers and challenges or impediments to operational effectiveness. Contact information for individuals in these groups was provided to the evaluation team by the DfE and all were invited to participate in surveys (with permission from Taskforces, in the case of SAFE points of contact within schools with pupils accessing SAFE interventions, and intervention provider organisations and teams).

While engagement with SAFE intervention providers was not included in our original evaluation plan, learning from Dives 1 and 2 demonstrated that such engagement would enhance our ability to build a comprehensive understanding of the SAFE Taskforces programme. Surveys of intervention providers across the programme were therefore added to our plans for Dives 3, 4 and 5.

Closed and open survey questions cover experiences and views, from the perspective of these different key informant groups, of SAFE Taskforce leadership and partnership working, intervention commissioning, referral processes, delivery, monitoring and quality assurance, and perceptions of outcomes.

Analysis

Our evaluation questions are designed to enable us to test and refine the intervention logic, by guiding collection and assessment of evidence relating to each theory of change construct (inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes). Several of our evaluation questions ask how and how well activities work, and we have a specific question on the key mechanisms through which SAFE Taskforces contribute to outcomes and impacts, which will enable us to elucidate mechanisms of change underpinning the intervention.

As we use our evaluation grid (described above) to develop data collection tools, data collection is aligned with our evaluation questions and the theory of change.

Collecting data in this way facilitates analysis of data in a way which is also structured according to the evaluation questions and informed by the theory of change. Data from interviews, focus group discussions, open-text survey responses, observations and document reviews are coded deductively (to identify data relevant to each question and to each theory of change construct, such as activities or outcomes), and inductively (to enable identification of unanticipated themes and findings). Data from closed survey questions are analysed through descriptive statistical analysis. All coded data, from each data source, are entered into an analysis matrix, which categorises data according to our evaluation questions, aligned with the Theory of Change. This enables us to triangulate and synthesise all data, from across data sources, that are relevant to an evaluation question.

Cost evaluation

The cost evaluation is the third component of this evaluation. It is led by RAND Europe. It will describe the costs associated with delivery of the SAFE Taskforce programme.

Research questions

In line with guidance from YEF around cost evaluation, we propose one research question for the cost evaluation:

EQ28: What are the costs of delivering the SAFE Taskforce programme?

Specifically, we will examine the costs to DfE and the costs incurred by SAFE Taskforces.

Research methods

Costs incurred by SAFE Taskforces

We propose to collect data on costs of the SAFE Taskforce programme from the DfE. This will include costs to DfE (including the costs of DfE staff time and services commissioned by DfE from PSTA to support SAFE Taskforces) and costs incurred by SAFE Taskforces. We understand that the DfE gathers and records the costs incurred by SAFE Taskforces throughout the set up and delivery of the programme, recording these within the following categories:

- Intervention costs (all the costs from the intervention section of the cost information form returned by SAFE Taskforces to DfE).

- Project oversight (costs of salaries for Project Coordinators, Commissioning Leads, Strategic Leads and Chairs).

- Administrative staff costs (cost of salaries for other administrative roles).

- Buildings and facilities (e.g. energy bills, buildings insurance, water rates and any other running costs of buildings).

- Materials and equipment (e.g. laptops, mobile phones, desks and chairs).

- Miscellaneous (all other costs).

Additional costs incurred by schools and intervention providers

We understand that there may be some costs incurred by SAFE schools and intervention providers that are not directly reimbursed by the fund from the DfE. We intend to use process evaluation data collection methods, including surveys and interviews with schools and intervention providers in Dives 4 and 5, to explore this.

Categorising costs

We will use categories for costs in line with YEF guidance, as set out in the table below.

Table 12: Cost evaluation categories and how these relate to DfE cost data categories

Cost evaluation categories (taken from YEF cost guidance)	DfE cost data categories
Programme procurement costs	Intervention costs
Staff costs	Project oversight Administrative staff costs
Buildings and facilities costs	Buildings and facilities
Materials and equipment	Materials and equipment
Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous

Each of the five cost categories outlined above will be broken down further into types of cost:

- **Set-up costs**: any costs incurred and invoiced by SAFE Taskforces before September 2022, i.e. up to the end of Phase 1 (set up) and the start of Phase 2 (delivery).

- **Recurring costs:** any costs incurred and invoiced by SAFE Taskforces in all cost categories from September 2022, i.e. during Phase 2 (delivery).

We will also set out **pre-requisite costs**. In line with YEF guidance, we will list what was already in place before the SAFE Taskforce programme was implemented (which programme funders would not be expected to pay for). Also in line with YEF guidance, precise costs for these will not be calculated as it is assumed these would not need to be paid for.

Analysis

By collecting these costs, we aim to construct a comprehensive picture of the costs of implementing the programme. Costs incurred by SAFE Taskforces will be combined to give an overall cost, which can further be broken down per Taskforce LA, and per pupil supported by the SAFE Taskforce programme.

We will provide the following cost figures:

- The total cost of the programme to DfE.

- The total cost of the programme incurred by SAFE Taskforces in all 10 areas.

- The average cost incurred per SAFE Taskforce.

- The average cost of the programme per pupil.

As per YEF guidance, within these categories, we will indicate how the total costs break down into set-up and recurring costs.

We will follow YEF's cost guidance when calculating the full cost of delivery, including adjusting costs to constant prices using GDP deflators. YEF recommends using the year that the delivery begins as the base year (in this case, 2022), with no discounts for social time preference. In calculating cost per participant, we will assume full compliance. Any potential benefits of durable goods beyond the life of the programme will be disregarded. We do not intend to conduct sensitivity analyses. We will account for uncertainty in the costings provided and document all assumptions made in the final calculations.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

The evaluation team is fully committed to taking an inclusive, fair and equitable approach to the evaluation.

RAND Europe's rigour Quality Assurance (QA) processes ensure the design, conduct and outputs of all our evaluations are accessible and culturally sensitive. A named 'QA continuous reviewer' assesses evaluation design and data collection tools, while a named 'QA output reviewer' assesses all outputs, such as formative feedback presentation slides and final reports. The QA reviewers apply standards including engagement and inclusion, relevance, rigour, transparency and legitimacy. These standards require approaches to design, conduct and reporting that consider relevant perspectives, the needs of the target audience and the research context, and are also scientifically justified, robust, balanced, independent and use an appropriate tone.

The evaluation team have expertise conducting research with and on vulnerable and marginalised groups, and a good understanding of the ethical and practical considerations involved. Previous RAND Europe projects with children at risk as primary beneficiaries include (among others): an Early Intervention Fund-funded stakeholder engagement survey to develop the policy agenda for individuals with adverse childhood experiences; a study of perceptions of 'gangs' in 'Ending Gang and Youth Violence' areas; evaluation of Porticus France's Early Childhood Development Programme for children living in the poorest areas of France; and developing the European Platform for Investing in Children. Dr Ana FitzSimons, the evaluation project manager, has conducted extensive research with marginalised populations including directly engaging with young people who have been affected by youth violence and criminal exploitation, who have experienced gender-based violence and abuse,

who are open to Children's Social Care, and who attend Alternative Provision education settings. She is also a member of RAND Europe's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group. FFT Education Datalab have extensive experience conducting analyses of data on vulnerable groups. Their research frequently considers impacts for disadvantaged pupils and/or those with SEN, and most FFT analysis examines disproportionality and/or inequality in outcomes, including attendance at alternative provision, experience of custody and exclusions.

The impact element of this evaluation will produce sub-group analysis for the primary outcomes, interacting the treatment effect with ethnicity and with Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) scores. The impact analyses will also control for differences in pupil populations across LAs using special educational needs (both with and without an Education, Health and Care plan) and free school meal eligibility as covariates.

Ethics registration

Ethical approval for the evaluation of the SAFE Taskforces programme was sought by the evaluation team from, and granted by, the RAND U.S. Human Subjects Protection Committee (HSPC). The HSPC ID is: 2022-N0243.

In order to ensure data collection could proceed in time, we adopted a two phased approach to ethics.

- We submitted a request to RAND Europe's Ethical Advisory Group (EAG) to review the planned work for Phase 1. The EAG provided an independent review of our approach and data collection tools and worked to identify and resolve any ethical issues before data collection took place.
- We consulted RAND Europe's Data Protection Officer to develop appropriate data protection procedures and communications for all phases, and expedited this process for all materials needed for Phase 1.
- Once the evaluation plan was approved, we submitted an ethics application to RAND's internal Human Subjects Protection Committee board. This is the process by which we gained ethical approval.

Data protection

This study uses personal and special category data gathered as part of the evaluation of the SAFE Taskforces programme, as set out in the table below.

Table 13: Personal data used by the study

	Personal data	Special category data

Impact evaluation	Pupils' names Pupils' dates of birth Pupils' Unique Pupil Numbers (UPNs)	Pupils' data held on the National Pupil Database (NPD) regarding special educational needs and eligibility for free school meals
Process evaluation	Names and contact information of members of SAFE Taskforces, SAFE schools and SAFE intervention providers	NA
Cost evaluation	NA	NA

The data controllers are the DfE and RAND Europe. RAND Europe is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), with registration number Z6947026, and is certified for adhering to ISO 9001:2015 quality management practices. University of Westminster and FFT Education Datalab are data processors. Once data are archived at the end of the study, Youth Endowment Fund will become the data controller of personal data.

The legal basis for processing special category personal data is public interest, as detailed in Article 6(1)(e) of the UK GDPR. The legal basis for processing other personal data is legitimate interest, as detailed in Article 6(1)(f) of the UK GDPR. These legitimate interests are the broader societal benefits of conducting high quality evaluation to expand the evidence base on what works to address youth violence, which may then be used to inform policy and practice. The study team processes only what is required to meet these legal bases and ensures security and safeguards are in place to protect the information.

To ensure the privacy and protection of the collected data, rigorous data protection procedures are implemented:

- Data sharing protocols are established between the DfE, the SAFE Taskforce grant holders and the Study Team to ensure that any sharing of data follows strict guidelines and processing is conducted in line with the agreed protocols.
- Data transfers are conducted using secure and encrypted channels to maintain confidentiality.
- Measures are taken to pseudonymise and protect the data. Personal identifying information is carefully separated from the collected data, and unique identifiers are assigned to each participant to maintain confidentiality.
- All personal data collected by the study team are stored in secure, on-shore servers in restricted-access folders. The personal data are kept separately from other (e.g. interview, focus group discussion and survey) data and are pseudonymised. These data will not be shared with, or accessed by, anyone not directly involved with the

study. These measures will prevent any unauthorised access to or use of interviewees' personal data in accordance with Data Protection Act (2018) and UK General Data Protection and Regulation (GDPR) requirements. No data will be saved on servers or shared with processors outside the UK. RAND Europe will securely delete all data held on its secure server six months after the end of the project.

- Information sheets and privacy notices are disseminated to all participants involved in the study. These provide clear and comprehensive information about the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, and how participants' data is handled and stored. Participants are given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences and full instructions on how to do this.

- Regular monitoring and audits are conducted to assess the compliance of data protection procedures throughout the study. Any potential risks are promptly addressed in consultation with RAND Europe's Data Protection Officer, and necessary actions taken to mitigate them.

Stakeholders and interests

In this section, we define the roles and responsibilities held by colleagues within the developer and delivery team, and the evaluation team; we set out other stakeholders involved in the delivery of the SAFE Taskforces programme; and we declare the source of study funding.

Developer and delivery team (DfE)

The developer and delivery team is the DfE. Within this team, we identify the following stakeholders:

- The DfE SAFE Taskforces Delivery Team, which sits within the Engagement in Education and Serious Violence Unit.
- The DfE Policy Team, which sits within the Engagement in Education and Serious Violence Unit.
- The DfE Serious Violence Research and Analysis Team.

These DfE teams are responsible for engaging with and providing guidance and support to SAFE Taskforces, promoting networking between the SAFE Taskforces, and reporting on the SAFE Taskforces programme within government. They also provide review and feedback to the evaluation team on study plans, data collection tools, Privacy Notices and Participant Information Sheets, and formative process evaluation findings.

We also identify a wider range of stakeholders who are involved in or support delivery of the SAFE Taskforces programme. These include:

- Members of the SAFE Taskforces, who are drawn from school leaders across primary, secondary and alternative provision, children's social care, violence reduction units (VRUs) and voluntary sector organisations.
- SAFE Taskforce project teams, who are employed to carry out specific roles (including Commissioning Leads, Project Coordinators and Data Analysts) in support of the work of the SAFE Taskforces.
- SAFE intervention providers, who deliver interventions to school pupils.
- Schools whose pupils access SAFE interventions.

The evaluation team (RAND Europe, University of Westminster and FFT Education Datalab)

Evaluation team leadership and oversight: The evaluation is led by Dr Ana FitzSimons, Research Leader in the Home Affairs and Social Policy team at RAND Europe and Principle Investigator of this study. The evaluation is managed by Miguel Subosa, Senior Analyst within the same team, and also benefits from advice and guidance from Dr Emma Disley, Director of the Home Affairs and Social Policy team at RAND Europe.

Impact evaluation: The impact evaluation strand is co-led by Dave Thomson of FFT Education Datalab and Professor Richard Dorsett of the University of Westminster. The impact evaluation team also includes Dr Veruska Oppedisano and Dr Gerda Buchmueller, both of the University of Westminster. RAND Europe contributes data collection and coordination, with a team of researchers overseen by Dr Ana FitzSimons with the support of Dr Emma Disley.

Process and cost evaluation: The process and cost evaluation is led by Dr Ana FitzSimons, working alongside a team of researchers at RAND Europe. These include Miguel Subosa, Mark Reed, Annelena Wolke, Ivana Cardamone and Tamara Strabel.

Evaluation funders (Youth Endowment Fund)

The evaluation was commissioned and is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). YEF is a fund established by the children's charity Impetus, which holds an endowment from the Home Office. The YEF aim to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence, by finding out 'what works' and putting this knowledge into practice.

Risks

The table below sets out the main risks to the evaluation, our mitigation strategies, our assessment of the likelihood of each risk occurring following mitigation measures, and our

assessment of the likely magnitude of impact. The principal investigator and project manager have responsibility for monitoring potential risks to the evaluation throughout the course of the study and regularly reporting to the YEF on risk management.

Table 14: Risks and mitigation strategies

Risk	Mitigation	Likelihood	Magnitude
The impact analysis is underpowered to detect impact	We conducted the preliminary analysis to consider power and effect sizes and suggest outcomes and data analysis methods accordingly. We will incorporate control variables to increase power. For LA-level outcomes, the dilution of the treatment is high, which may affect the probability of detecting an impact of the intervention.	High	High
Delays in release of outputs from the SRS	SRS has been operating with substantial delays (of more than 4 weeks in some cases) in the release of outputs that are needed to inform the impact evaluation. We have budgeted and timetabled additional time to allow for delays without affecting overall delivery.	High	Low
The impact evaluation produces unexpected results.	The impact evaluation may produce unexpected results which require detailed investigation to explain. We consider the risk to be low as the methods we use are standard and the code we plan to use has been written	Low	Low

	and tested, but some risk will always remain in a project of this complexity.		
Significant variation in implementation of SAFE across the 10 participating LAs means that a SAFE model is difficult to describe, which creates challenges for interpreting results from an impact evaluation approach looking at the effect of SAFE on outcomes in all 10 Taskforces.	We will use the compliance analysis to consider how far lack of implementation is an issue. We will use the data collection methods in IPE to understand and document this variation and remain flexible in how we use this to respond in, and report on, our impact analysis.	Medium	Low
Stakeholders involved in the implementation are too busy to engage with the evaluation, leading to attrition	We carefully consider data requests, ensuring they minimise burden on participants and stakeholders. We allow plenty of time for planning and participation (e.g. holding surveys open for at least three weeks). We avoid data collection from schools at busy periods in the academic year and school holidays.	Medium	Low
Risks associated with data protection (for example, accidental disclosures or breaches)	The evaluation team has extensive experience of complying with GDPR. RAND Europe's in-house data protection team provide guidance and advice. We have data sharing agreements in place and continue to work with DfE as joint controllers and to ensure the safe transfer of data. The evaluation team has developed relevant procedures and processes	Low	Low

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ leading
	around data transfer, withdrawal and breaches, which are followed and documented.	

Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ leading
Nov 2021 – Aug 2026	**Evaluation management:** Regular (bi-weekly/monthly) meetings with DfE/YEF	RAND Europe
Nov – Dec 2021	**Co-design:** Attendance at co-design meetings Finalisation of programme theory of change Finalisation of evaluation plan	RAND Europe
Jan – Apr 2022	**Dive 1 evaluation management:** Application for ethical approval Development of data sharing and data protection protocols	RAND Europe
Jan – Apr 2022	**Dive 1 impact evaluation activity:** Application for NPD data	FFT Education Datalab
Jan – Apr 2022	**Dive 1 IPE activity:** Observations of Taskforce and Taskforce-DfE meetings Review of programme documents Stakeholder mapping Interviews and focus groups Delivery of formative feedback based on Dive 1 IPE methods	RAND Europe

May – Aug 2022	**Dive 2 evaluation management:** Finalisation of ethical approval Finalisation of data sharing and data protection protocols	RAND Europe
May – Aug 2022	**Dive 2 impact evaluation activity:** Prepare Taskforces/interventions/schools for data collection (UPN)	RAND Europe
May – Aug 2022	**Dive 2 IPE activity:** Observations of Taskforce and Taskforce-DfE meetings Review of programme documents Surveys Interviews and focus groups Delivery of formative feedback based on Dive 2 IPE methods	RAND Europe
Sep 2022 – Aug 2023	**Dive 3 impact evaluation activities:** Collection of UPN/monitoring data, including liaison with Taskforces/interventions/schools Intervention-level impact evaluation feasibility study Programme-level impact evaluation planning, including preliminary analysis to inform design choice	RAND Europe University of Westminster FFT Education Datalab
Sep 2022 – Aug 2023	**Dive 3 IPE activity:** Observations of Taskforce and Taskforce-DfE meetings Review of programme documents Surveys Interviews and focus groups Delivery of formative feedback based on Dive 3 IPE methods	RAND Europe
Sep 2022 –	**Dive 3 cost evaluation activities:**	RAND Europe

Aug 2023	Collection of cost data from DfE	
Sep 2023 – Aug 2024	**Dive 4 impact evaluation activities:** Collection of UPN/monitoring data, including liaison with Taskforces/interventions/schools	RAND Europe
Sep 2023 – Aug 2024	**Dive 4 IPE activities:** Observations of Taskforce and Taskforce-DfE meetings Review of programme documents Surveys Interviews and focus groups Delivery of formative feedback based on Dive 4 IPE methods	RAND Europe
Sep 2023 – Aug 2024	**Dive 4 cost evaluation activities:** Collection of cost data from DfE	RAND Europe
Sep 2024 – Aug 2025	**Dive 5 impact evaluation activities:** Collection of UPN/monitoring data, including liaison with Taskforces/interventions/schools Delivery of intervention-level impact evaluation feasibility report Delivery of Study Protocol and Statistical Analysis Plan	RAND Europe
Sep 2024 – Aug 2025	**Dive 5 IPE activities:** Observations of Taskforce and Taskforce-DfE meetings Review of programme documents Surveys Interviews and focus groups Case studies Delivery of formative feedback based on Dive 5 IPE methods	RAND Europe

Sep 2024 – Aug 2025	**Dive 5 cost evaluation activities:** Collection of cost data from DfE	RAND Europe
Sep 2025 – Jul 2026	**Summative analysis and reporting:** Impact evaluation summative analysis and report writing (dependent on timelines of NPD release and release of this into SRS) IPE summative analysis and report writing Cost evaluation summative analysis and report writing	RAND Europe University of Westminster FFT Education Datalab
Aug-Oct 2026	**Submission of draft evaluation report (dependent on data availability in SRS for impact analysis)**	RAND Europe

Annex 1: SAFE Programme Phase 1 and Phase 2 logic models

Phase 1 (set up) logic model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
DfE: • £32m total funding (for set up and delivery) • Capacity[19] of DfE policy, research and delivery teams **Local partners:** • Capacity of local schools' and organisations' capacity **Programme Board:**	**DfE:** • Identify areas where SAFE Taskforces should be created based on measures of serious youth violence and discussion with DfE and local area stakeholders • Identify and communicate with schools and local organisations • Issue grant agreements to SAFE Taskforces • Develop and disseminate guidance • Commission an organisation to provide commissioning support for the SAFE Taskforces • Procure training and support package for SAFE Taskforces • Provide one-to-one support to SAFE Taskforces developing Strategic Needs Assessments and	**DfE:** • Relevant, accessible, actionable, evidence based and timely guidance for SAFE Taskforces • Appointment of suitable organisation providing commissioning support to SAFE Taskforces • Appointment of suitable organisation to provide training and support • Signed grant agreements • Funding issued to SAFE Taskforces • Creation of platforms for SAFE Taskforces to share best practice and collaborate	• SAFE Taskforces are ready to begin commissioning and operation

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[19] In these logic models, by 'capacity' we mean resources, time and skills.

	Delivery Plans; feedback and sign off Strategic Needs Assessments and Delivery Plans **Local partners:** - Establish the Taskforce (ensure all relevant partners are included, agree SAFE Taskforce membership, identify SAFE Taskforce lead and who will hold the funding, design SAFE Taskforce structure, establish processes) - Conduct evidence-informed, joined-up Strategic Needs Assessment in line with DfE guidance - Develop evidence-informed, joined-up Delivery Plan and referral process in line with DfE guidance - Communicate and share good practice with other SAFE Taskforces	**Local partners:** - SAFE Taskforce is created in each area with appropriate membership, structure and processes - Approved Strategic Needs Assessment from every SAFE Taskforce (evidence informed, joined up and in line with DfE guidance) - Approved Delivery Plan and referral process (evidence informed, joined up and in line with DfE guidance) is in place for every SAFE Taskforce	
• Capacity of Programme Board members			

Phase 2 (delivery) logic model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
DfE:	**DfE:**	**DfE:**	**SAFE Taskforces/local partners:**	• Reduction in serious

• £32m total funding (for set up and delivery) • Capacity of DfE policy, research and delivery teams **SAFE Taskforces/local partners:** • Capacity of individual members of SAFE Taskforces • Capacity of local schools and organisations **Programme Board:** • Capacity of Programme Board members **Intervention providers:**	• Provide ongoing monitoring of SAFE Taskforces • Provide ongoing communication with and support to SAFE Taskforces, local partners and schools • Update and disseminate guidance annually/as required • Monitor and assure performance of organisation providing commissioning support • Provide feedback and sign off to Strategic Needs Assessments, Delivery Plans and theories of change for individual interventions as required • Analyse relevant data to support overall SAFE programme and individual Taskforces **SAFE Taskforces/local partners:** • Identify and commission interventions in line with Strategic Needs Assessment and Delivery Plan, including	• Relevant, accessible, actionable, evidence-based and timely updated guidance for SAFE Taskforces • Accurate, relevant and timely results of data analysis **SAFE Taskforces/local partners:** • Interventions commissioned in line with Delivery Plan and Strategic Needs Assessment • Theories of change for each individual intervention commissioned • Updated Strategic Needs Assessments as required (evidence-informed, joined up and in line with DfE guidance) • Updated Delivery Plan annually (evidence-	• Stronger, more effective local partnerships for addressing causes of serious youth violence • Improved ability to identify and target pupils at risk of involvement in serious youth violence • More efficient use of resources as a result of joint commissioning • Improved understanding about evidence-based interventions to address the causes of serious youth violence • Improved understanding about how to commission and deliver effective interventions to address the causes of serious youth violence **Pupils:** • Improved school attendance • Improved behaviour at school	youth violence

• Capacity of delivery organisations	developing theories of change for individual interventions • Update Strategic Needs Assessment and Delivery Plan as required • Provide ongoing leadership and coordination and undertake partnership working • Monitor and assure quality and fidelity to the evidence of interventions and referral processes • Communication and collaboration between SAFE Taskforces **Intervention Providers:** • Delivery of interventions with fidelity to the evidence	informed, joined up and in line with DfE guidance) • Effective implementation of referral processes • Effective assurance of quality and fidelity of interventions and referral processes • Accurate and relevant monitoring data/reports • Effective sharing of good practices and knowledge between SAFE Taskforces **Intervention providers:** • Effective implementation and delivery of interventions **Pupils:** • Participation in SAFE interventions	• Improved social and emotional wellbeing	

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Home Office

🌐 **youthendowmentfund.org.uk**

✉️ hello@youthendowmentfund.org.uk

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