REPORT

Safeguarding, Education and Serious Youth Violence in England and Wales

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About this report

Addressing serious violence is crucial for the well-being of children, their families and society at large. Violence can happen in and around schools, and therefore, effective educational strategies around safeguarding can serve as a cornerstone in early intervention, potentially reducing the prevalence of serious violence as well as improving the identification of and response to risks of and incidents of violence. By equipping education staff with the necessary tools, schools, colleges and alternative provision can play a pivotal role in identifying at-risk individuals and facilitating appropriate safeguarding support services.

The Youth Endowment Fund commissioned this research to fully explore how schools, colleges and alternative provision safeguard children from serious violence, how well they are currently doing this, what challenges they face and how current safeguarding approaches might be improved.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

- Serious violence (SV) involving children and young people is a prevalent safeguarding issue for schools, and addressing it is crucial for the well-being of children, but education staff need appropriate training and support to fulfil this role effectively in partnership with other agencies.
- Safeguarding is one of the most important responsibilities of education staff; however, schools and colleges are not currently statutory partners in local safeguarding partnerships (LSPs), and their engagement in multi-agency partnership working varies, particularly at a strategic level. This makes it more challenging to separate issues relating to general safeguarding responses from those relating specifically to SV.
- There is no single agreed definition of SV that affects children and young people in safeguarding policy, where SV is included in a list of extra-familial harms. This contributes to a lack of clear safeguarding responses in relation to SV.
- There are significant disparities in children's experiences of violence, youth justice and education at a national level. Black children continue to be overrepresented in most stages of the youth justice system. Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or those eligible for free school meals continue to have high rates of suspension and exclusion, potentially putting them at risk of involvement in violence or exploitation.

1.2. Methods

- **Our research set out to answer five research questions:**
    - Where do schools, colleges and alternative provision (AP) settings sit within the SV safeguarding system across England and Wales?
    - How effectively are schools, colleges and AP settings fulfilling the safeguarding role to prevent violence?
    - What barriers currently exist to timely identification of and support for children at risk of violence?
    - Is there evidence of racial or other disparities in current safeguarding practices?
    - What policy and practice changes could improve the role schools, colleges and AP play in safeguarding children from SV?
- **We used a multi-method approach utilising four key research methods to answer the questions:**
    - A rapid evidence synthesis to gather information from existing research and practice: 77 pieces of literature were reviewed, including 46 peer-reviewed journals and 31 grey literature documents, such as inspection reports, guidance reports and evaluations.

    - Qualitative interviews with 43 safeguarding professionals across England and Wales were carried out, split between school leaders (22) and professionals working across safeguarding partnerships and agencies (21).
    - We commissioned a survey from Teacher Tapp of approximately 7,000 teachers and leaders to understand more about their training in, and confidence in, recognising signs of SV and to test some of the insights gained through the qualitative research interviews.
    - An advisory group of five individuals with expertise in safeguarding and education was convened to offer support, advise in the design of the research, and test the resulting insights. An additional member was recruited from the Centre for Education & Youth's Young Collective to provide the perspective of a young person with lived experience of SV.
- **Findings from all four methods have been synthesised** to produce the overall findings and insights for policy and practice in this report.

1.3. Summary of findings

Where do schools, colleges, and alternative provision settings sit within the serious violence safeguarding system across England and Wales?

- There is minimal reference to SV in current safeguarding policy and guidance and little evidence to indicate how education should perform its role in safeguarding responses to SV in practice.
- Schools play an important and increasing role in safeguarding children at risk of SV, but their level of strategic engagement in safeguarding partnerships varies significantly across local authorities.
- AP and pupil referral units play a vital role in education, but designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) report concerns about managing safeguarding risks and accountability, particularly when children are at risk of being exploited or becoming involved in violence.
- Further education colleges also reported feeling less connected to the wider education and safeguarding system, describing delayed or selective information sharing from other settings and being left out of invitations to strategic engagement opportunities.
- There is no typical pathway for a child identified as being at risk of SV, with a range of terminology and processes for referrals across local authorities.

How effectively are schools, colleges and alternative provision settings fulfilling the safeguarding role to prevent serious violence?

- There is limited robust evidence on the impact of safeguarding responses to SV within schools, colleges and AP settings. Schools and colleges often lack clear indicators to measure the effectiveness of their safeguarding practice.

- DSLs are perceived to be extremely knowledgeable about their students and the local community and use this knowledge to support safeguarding work, but many find it challenging to access suitable support at the right time for children at risk of becoming involved in violence, limiting their effectiveness.
- Teaching staff are playing a larger role than they used to in safeguarding processes that previously sat exclusively with DSLs, but they lack specialist training or knowledge of the effectiveness of approaches.

What barriers currently exist to timely identification of and support for children at risk of serious violence?

- The availability and quality of training around SV for education staff is variable, and staff report a lack of confidence in identifying children at risk of SV.
- Definitions and early indicators of SV are not consistent and are seen as a barrier to early intervention, leading to difficulties in ascertaining safeguarding thresholds in relation to behaviours and risks.
- There can be a lack of continuity of support for children when they transition from child to adult services, with DSLs having less understanding of the adult safeguarding system and available support.
- Information sharing remains inconsistent both within safeguarding partnerships and across local authorities, and this acts as a barrier to both effectiveness and early intervention.
- The necessity of gaining consent from children and families is seen by some safeguarding professionals as a significant potential barrier to early intervention and ongoing support.

Is there evidence of racial or other disparities in current safeguarding practices?

- National data shows clear disparities in children's experiences of violence, youth justice and education; however, there is limited robust evidence on disparities in current safeguarding practices.
- Local data and patterns around SV can differ from national statistics, making it difficult to identify inequities in practice at the level of individual education settings.
- Children identified with SEND and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were most commonly mentioned as disproportionately represented in safeguarding concerns.
- Absence from school, particularly due to elective home education or exclusion, is considered a significant risk factor for involvement in SV and other safeguarding concerns.

What policy and practice changes could improve the role schools, colleges and alternative provision play in safeguarding children from serious violence?

- Education staff should have specific training around SV and safeguarding to improve confidence in identifying children at risk.
- DSLs want greater alignment and the simplification of referral processes across authorities when escalating safeguarding concerns relating to SV.
- Better and more timely information sharing between safeguarding partners and across education is needed for wider safeguarding concerns, as well as specifically regarding SV.
- Education needs to be more involved in strategic partnerships working.
- Earlier intervention, starting at a young age, is necessary to prevent children from becoming involved in violence in the future.
- Short-term funding limits the effectiveness of interventions by creating uncertainty around continuity.
- Listening and actively responding to the voices of children and young people and their communities are essential to effective safeguarding practices.

Insights for policy and practice

Based on our review of the evidence, our recommendations focus on three main areas:

1) Supporting education staff in effectively carrying out their safeguarding role in relation to SV
2) Strengthening the role of education in local safeguarding children partnerships and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
3) Empowering children, young people and communities to respond to SV.

1. Support education staff in effectively carrying out their safeguarding role in relation to serious violence

- The Department for Education (DfE) should support LSPs in standardising referral processes and terminology across different local authorities in order to support the development of effective responses to safeguarding and SV, as per existing recommendations around social care responses to extra-familial harm.
- The DfE and Education Wales should create a shared definition of SV in relation to safeguarding children that takes a holistic view of the vulnerabilities of children and brings together the different indicators of harm currently identified in policy guidance (Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2023; Keeping Learners Safe, 2022).
- A stronger narrative around serious youth violence should be built into existing transitional safeguarding guidance within LSPs but also incorporated nationally into Keeping Children Safe in Education and Keeping Learners Safe to support the

work of DSLs with children approaching and reaching the age of 18 while in education settings.

- Examples of good practices in transitional services should be shared more widely by safeguarding partnerships. This could be done at the local level through safeguarding partnership annual reports or inspections/audits.
- The DfE should incorporate content on SV into the National Professional Qualification for Leading Behaviour and Culture (NPQLBC) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for senior leaders, headteachers and executive leaders. This should draw on evidence in relation to effective interventions, such as the Youth Endowment Fund toolkit, and the importance of inclusive cultures and support for balancing behaviour and safeguarding concerns in practice.
- The DfE should introduce an additional NPQ for designated and deputy safeguarding leads that recognises the importance and responsibility of the role. This should include specialised training in responding to SV alongside other safeguarding duties and responsibilities as outlined in existing guidance, as well as how to improve training on SV and safeguarding for other education staff.
- Providers of DSL training should include risk mitigation and management planning for children in education settings who have experienced violence and/or been involved in the criminal justice system.
- Schools and Trusts should ensure that safeguarding training encompasses SV and explores the possible links between other extra-familial harms, such as child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation, as outlined in policy guidance. Training should also explicitly reference the possible links between attendance, suspension and exclusion and the risk of children becoming involved in SV.

2. Strengthen the role of education in local safeguarding children partnerships and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

- The DfE should ensure that guidance and support documents to implement the measures within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill are co-produced with safeguarding professionals from a range of education settings. These should operationalise the mandated requirements in Working Together (HM Government, 2023) regarding education's representation and input at a strategic and operational level in safeguarding arrangements. Any documentation should specifically reference how to protect children from involvement in violence.
- The DfE should provide examples of good safeguarding practice and what 'effective' education involvement in multi-agency safeguarding looks like at a strategic and operational level. This may already be known from other DfE commissioned work, such as the review of Annual Safeguarding Partnership Reports, but requires wider sharing within specific guidance, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2024a), Keeping Learners Safe (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022) and Working Together (HM Government, 2023), to provide more effective and consistent working.

- The Government should direct targeted funding for early intervention and preventative work around SV in education settings to ensure more equitable access for children and young people, given the importance of youth clubs/activities and specialist services in dealing with those concerns below statutory thresholds.

3. Empower children, young people and communities to respond to serious violence by listening and amplifying their voices

- The DfE should work with schools and organisations representing groups of schools to co-create national measures of belonging and inclusion with children. These should be robust and reliable and reviewed annually to help drive school improvement and target investment. These measures should specifically include measures relating to feelings of safety.
- Education settings should consult with children on how they could feel safer, both in and around school, and co-produce action plans to implement suggested changes, drawing on evidence-based interventions (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024).
- LSPs should set up mechanisms for regularly consulting children on their perceptions of SV and how agencies should respond to concerns raised. Importantly, they should report regularly (via annual safeguarding reports) on how they have engaged with children and young people and what the impact of this engagement has been.
- Children should be taught to understand the impact of SV and where to access further information and support through its inclusion within the curriculum for relationships education (DfE, 2021). Content should be drawn from the evidence of existing research on approaches to preventing serious youth violence (Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit, n.d.) and delivered by those with specialist expertise, utilising a whole school approach that does not exclude certain genders or cohorts.

2. Introduction

Safeguarding children in England and Wales

Schools and colleges and their staff have statutory safeguarding duties towards children. These duties are outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education (Department for Education [DfE], 2024a) in England and Keeping Learners Safe (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022) in Wales.

Part one of Keeping Children Safe in Education defines safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as:

- Providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge
- Protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online
- Preventing the impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

(DfE, 2024a:4).

Keeping Learners Safe, in Wales, defines safeguarding and promoting the well-being of all children attending an education setting as:

- Protecting children from risk of abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm
- Preventing impairment of children's health or development
- Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- Taking action to enable all children to achieve the best outcomes.

(Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022:3-4)

Part two of Keeping Children Safe in Education sets out the requirement for governing bodies of schools in England to ensure that governors, trustees and staff receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training at induction and then through regular updates. Part one, which staff are explicitly expected to read, states that staff should be aware of systems in school to support safeguarding, be aware of their local early help process and understand their role in it (Long & Foster, 2024:10-11).

Education settings are also part of a wider safeguarding system for children, which is described further in the statutory guidance for multi-agency working. In England, this is outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2023). In Wales, the equivalent statutory guidance is Working Together to Safeguard People (Welsh Government, 2022), supported by the Wales Safeguarding Procedures (2020), which provide a consistent framework for safeguarding practice across agencies. In Wales, the legal framework for social service provision is established by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which came into force in April 2016. This legislation

underpins safeguarding duties and multi-agency collaboration, reinforcing the responsibilities set out in the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 as they apply in Wales.

Recent proposed changes to the education safeguarding system in England have been outlined by the DfE in the policy statement published in November 2024, Keeping children safe, helping families thrive (DfE, 2024b). These changes stop short of making education a statutory partner in safeguarding arrangements, as originally proposed in the MacAlister report (MacAlister, 2022), but call for the strengthening of the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Legislative changes propose that all education settings be named as relevant agencies by default and that representation from education be included in local safeguarding arrangements at both the operational and strategic decision-making levels (DfE, 2024b).

Challenges in the current system

Lack of clarity around how education should be represented in safeguarding processes and arrangements generally further complicates safeguarding responses to serious violence (SV). There is no single agreed definition of SV. The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) guidance for school, college and alternative provision (AP) leaders defines it as follows (YEF, 2024):

> *Violence is the use or threat of intentional physical force. It can include murder, physical assault, sexual assault, harm (or the threat of harm) with a weapon, and robbery.*

Guidance documents for education settings do not define SV. In Working Together, SV is listed alongside criminal exploitation, county lines, online harm, sexual exploitation, teenage relationship abuse and the influences of extremism as a form of extra-familial harm (EFH) or harm experienced outside the home (HM Government, 2023:67). Keeping Children Safe in Education outlines indicators of risk from serious violent crime, including increased absence, changes in friendships, decline in educational performance or a significant change in well-being (DfE, 2024a:17).

The guidance relating to safeguarding requirements for education settings in relation to SV is very limited. Keeping Children Safe in Education, for England, has one paragraph (46) specifically relating to SV, which briefly outlines indicators of risk, as well as other separate sections referencing children criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation (CSE) as well as child-on-child abuse. Further information in Appendix B highlights the increased likelihood of involvement in SV by factors such as being male, being permanently excluded from school or having been involved in offending, such as theft, and it directs professionals to other resources (DfE, 2024a). There is no specific reference to SV in Keeping Learners Safe, for Wales, outside of gender-based and sexual violence and when associated with terrorism (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022).

As outlined in the statutory Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance, schools, colleges and AP should be engaged, involved and included in safeguarding

arrangements (HM Government, 2023), as their role within their local safeguarding partnership (LSP) has been noted as being paramount for effective safeguarding (McManus et al., 2021). The government's Serious Violence Duty also requires the involvement of education settings to help agree strategies with the LSP for the reduction of violence (Home Office, 2022, from section 291). Working Together to Safeguard Children also outlined the requirement of each LSP to publish their first strategy to preent and reduce serious violence strategy in January 2024 (HM Government, 2023:124). However, it is worth noting the lack of assertive language in how to operationalise this collaborative working, stating the vital role of education and that local area close collaboration can improve support and interventions offered and reduce SV. Instead, it refers to the DfE Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance for further guidance.

Safeguarding is one of the most important responsibilities of education staff; however, education is not currently a statutory partner in LSPs. To support staff in carrying out such safeguarding duties and to ensure effective multi-agency working – particularly with local authorities and children's social care – every school and college is mandated to have a designated safeguarding lead (The Child Safeguarding Review Panel, 2024; DfE, 2023a). However, a number of child practice reviews have highlighted staff failing to be 'professionally curious' in listening to the experiences of children, responding to concerns, sharing information and engaging in multi-agency safeguarding referral mechanisms (DfE, 2023a; McManus et al., 2023; The Child Safeguarding Review Panel, 2024). Although outside the scope of this report, The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was published in January 2025 (DfE, 2025) and provided confirmation that schools were not to be considered as a multi-agency partner but as a relevant agency to be 'included and represented at strategic and operational levels in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements' (p. 10).

While they have clear statutory duties, such as cooperating with Section 47[1] enquiries, the involvement of education as partners in strategic thinking around safeguarding and violence prevention and reduction is currently hugely varied across England and Wales (McManus et al., 2021). The DfE's recent report, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive (DfE, 2024b), recognises the pivotal role played by education in safeguarding and has recommended that the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is strengthened. Additionally, an Ofsted analysis report released in November 2024 examined multi-agency responses to serious youth violence with findings derived from six joint targeted area inspections (JTAIs). It highlighted concerns around particular cohorts of children at higher risk of involvement in SV in any capacity (e.g. children with special educational needs and disabilities [SEND]) and the impact of exclusion. It highlights the importance of education (with a specific section on the role of education) as part of LSPs at the strategic level to drive collaborative working from the top, with good practice examples extracted throughout to help embed wider uptake of effective working.

[1] A Section 47 enquiry is a child protection investigation to determine if a child is at risk of significant harm.

> *Where education representatives were present in strategic meetings, and fully engaged in developing and implementing a multi-agency approach to addressing serious youth violence, we saw that this made a real difference for children. Children received better, more coordinated responses to their needs when education was seen as a protective factor. Education was clearly recognised and prioritised in some, but not all, areas as an essential element in approaches to prevent and minimise the risk of serious youth violence.* (Ofsted et al., 2024g)

In the year ending March 2024, there were 35,600 proven offences committed by children in England and Wales, a year-on-year increase for the second consecutive year (Youth Justice Board, 2025). Between 2008 and 2019, the social and economic costs of youth SV in England and Wales were estimated to be £11 billion (Youth Violence Commission, 2020). These costs were estimated to result from police, health services and the costs associated with physical and emotional harm (Youth Violence Commission, 2020). Recent research from the DfE suggests that violence is prevalent as a safeguarding issue in schools. Responses to questions asked in April 2023 suggested that 43% of secondary schools and 9% of primary schools were dealing with knife crime as a safeguarding issue at the time of the research. This was explained as "meaning you have taken action, however small, as a result of recognising a safeguarding risk to one of your pupils" (DfE, 2023b:74).

There are also significant disparities in children's experiences of violence, youth justice and education. Black children continue to be overrepresented across most stages of the youth justice system, accounting for 12% of arrests and 11% of all children cautioned or sentenced in the year ending March 2023 (Youth Justice Board, 2024b). For the year ending March 2024, the data shows the number of arrests of Black children decreased by 25%; however, the number of arrests where ethnicity was unknown increased by 23%, so the changes should be treated with caution (Youth Justice Board, 2025). Pupils with special educational needs and free school meal eligibility continue to have some of the highest rates of suspensions and permanent exclusions. Gypsy/Roma pupils continue to have the highest suspension and exclusion rates for 2023/24, with Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils and Mixed White and Black Caribbean children having the second highest rates of suspensions and second highest rates of permanent exclusion (Education Statistics, 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research questions

This research was guided by five research questions:

1) System mapping

Where do schools, colleges and AP sit in the SV safeguarding system across England and Wales? In addition:

a) What local partnership models exist to facilitate the involvement of education settings?

b) How is safeguarding in education settings governed?

c) What is the typical pathway for a child if the risk of violence is identified within education? How does this vary regionally?

2) Effectiveness

To what extent are schools, colleges and AP settings in England and Wales effectively fulfilling their safeguarding role to prevent violence? In addition:

a) What support and training specifically related to violence do DSLs in these settings receive?

b) To what extent do all staff in these settings (beyond just the DSL) fulfil their roles in safeguarding children from violence?

c) What indicators are most useful in assessing the effectiveness of education safeguarding practice between settings/areas?

3) Barriers

What barriers currently exist to the timely identification of and support for children at risk of violence?

4) Inequities

Is there evidence of racial disparities in current safeguarding practices?
Is there evidence of any other inequities? If so, how might these inequities be eradicated?

5) Policy and practice changes

What policy and practice changes could improve the role schools, colleges and AP play in safeguarding children from SV? Are there specific models/examples of best practices that could be adopted more widely?

3.2. Overview of methods

In order to answer the above research questions, we used the research methods set out in Table 1 below. Each method is discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections.

Table 1: Overview of research methods

Method	Overview
Rapid evidence synthesis (RES)	A predefined protocol was drawn up to outline the scope with criteria for inclusion and exclusion, with a search across eight databases, including academic and grey literature. After screening, 77 papers were included in the final synthesis and deductively coded for review.
Qualitative interviews with school leaders and professionals working across safeguarding partnerships and agencies	The findings from the RES were used to inform the qualitative interview questions. Interviews were carried out with 43 professionals across England and Wales from a mixture of education settings and safeguarding partnerships.
Survey of teachers and leaders	We commissioned Teacher Tapp to run a survey of approximately 7,000 teachers and leaders in schools and colleges in England to test some of the insights gained through the qualitative research interviews.
Advisory group	The advisory group was convened to support and advise in the design of the qualitative research and then again to review and guide the creation of the report's insights. A young person with lived experience supported the creation of the pathways diagrams.

3.3. Rapid evidence synthesis

A rapid evidence synthesis (RES) is a fast and relatively comprehensive (although not exhaustive) way of gathering known literature to explore a topic in a timely way. RES is often used to provide evidence for policy and practice, so it was deemed the most appropriate way to begin the research on SV in education settings.

There are several stages to producing an RES, starting with a pre-defined protocol that sets out the research focus to ensure consistency and transparency (Appendix A). Within the protocol, the scope of the review is clearly outlined, alongside the search strategy, which includes search terms, criteria for inclusion and exclusion, search parameters, data extraction and data analysis. To capture the widest range of evidence, we collaborated with Manchester Metropolitan University librarians and search experts, the stakeholder advisory group, and the YEF. The five overarching research questions

framed the data analysis, with the team preparing a comprehensive deductive coding framework.

Appendix A shows the PICT framework (Population, phenomena of Interest, Context, Type of study) that was chosen to clarify relevant search terms. These were put into search strings using Boolean terms. For example: child* OR "young person" AND violen* OR safeguarding AND education. Academic databases searched were EBSCO (including CINAHL), Web of Science, The British Education Index, Digital Education Resource Archive, Teacher Reference Centre and The Cochrane Library. Grey literature searches were conducted through local authorities and third sector websites and by asking the advisory group for recommendations. The searches were exported into Covidence, a reference management system. Literature from non-academic sources was kept in an excel spreadsheet on a shared, password-protected drive. Two researchers conducted the searches, and the whole team consulted with the advisory group.

3.4. Inclusion and exclusion

Publications were included if they were available in the English language, published between 2018 and 2024 to cover pre-Covid, during Covid and post-Covid and to align with the start of the SV strategy. Publications were excluded if they included individuals who were over 18 years old or excluded children who are deregistered from statutory education (children excluded from school but still registered were included; however, deregistered children who were homeschooled through choice were not included, as there is no responsibility for schools for these children, though the study did include studies considering children and young people moving or leaving the state sector). Due to the volume of returns, we later excluded publications from outside the UK. The results are shown in the PRISMA flow diagram (Appendix B).

After screening, 77 papers were included in the final synthesis. The 46 academic papers were quality assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018), as shown in Appendix C. The two reviewers decided not to quality assess the grey literature, as some of this was asked to be included by the funders (YEF) and the advisory group, as the variety of types of literature meant that any quality assessment tool for grey literature would not have been useful and would have been problematic to apply to the MMAT. The table of inclusion can be found in Appendix D.

Narrative synthesis has been conducted on the final 77 papers (Popay et al., 2006). The papers were deductively coded using NVivo as a system of storing and keeping track of the coded data. These codes were then aligned to an overarching research question to inform what is known about safeguarding and violence involving children, what is working well, where challenges are being experienced and what is required to improve systems.

In total, we reviewed 77 pieces of literature that were retrieved and catalogued and met our inclusion criteria. Of the research reviewed that was published in peer-reviewed journals (n = 46), 28 used exclusively qualitative methods (typically involving interviews, focus groups, observations and reviews of policies, procedures and serious

case reviews), 7 used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, and 11 used exclusively quantitative methods (typically surveys and questionnaires). Of the grey literature reviewed (n = 31), there was a mixture of government-mandated statutory guidance, Member of Parliament (MP) briefings, MP or parliamentary group-led reviews and reports, JTAI reports, research, guidance, strategy and briefing reports (methods included surveys, interviews and focus groups), and child safeguarding practice reviews.

Several notable papers and government reports were published between November 2024 and January 2025. These were, therefore, included after the report had been initially completed due to their relevance, but no further systematic searching was conducted at that point.

3.5. Qualitative interviews

Building on the findings of the RES, qualitative research was conducted to provide a richer picture of how safeguarding practice is experienced by practitioners in local authorities across England and Wales. It explored perspectives on the challenges facing frontline practitioners in fulfilling their roles and the realities facing children at risk of SV.

3.6. Participant recruitment

Recruitment was initially focused on areas across England and Wales which were identified as experiencing high levels of youth violence and/or other underlying risk factors, such as areas scoring highly on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and experiencing high levels of school exclusions. Local safeguarding children partnerships (LSCPs) in these areas were contacted to explore their interest in participation and to seek their support for further recruitment from education settings. Based on response rates and the timeline, recruitment was expanded to contacting all LSCPs in England to ensure good representation across the different regions. Personal contacts were used to secure interviews with partnerships in Wales. Contacts made in the safeguarding partnerships helped to secure interviews with safeguarding leads in education settings, along with direct recruitment through personal contacts and requests on social media.

3.7. Data collection

Semi-structured interviews of up to 60 minutes were held online, exploring the experiences of safeguarding practitioners across a range of roles in order to help us answer the research questions outlined above. In total, 43 interviews were held, split almost evenly between practitioners in education settings (22) and across other roles related to education and safeguarding in safeguarding partnerships, violence reduction units (VRUs) or local authority roles (21). They represented all regions of England and one region in Wales.

3.8. Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed, and a hybrid approach to coding was used. Deductive codes were used based on the research questions that formed the basis of the semi-structured interviews, along with inductive codes to allow for sub-themes to emerge from the analysis. All interviewees provided informed consent to participate in the interview process.

3.9. Survey

We commissioned Teacher Tapp to run a survey of approximately 7,000 teachers and leaders in schools and colleges in England to test some of the insights gained through the qualitative research interviews. The questions were answered on 3 December 2024.

Three specific questions were asked of respondents:

1. Have you had specific training on SV in the last two years?
2. Are you confident that you could identify a child who is involved in or at risk of becoming involved in serious violent crime?
3. Do you think safeguarding leads should undertake a professional qualification, such as an NPQ, similar to that required by Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators?

We also provided an open-ended response question for respondents to tell us about any training they had received on SV. Respondents were also asked to confirm whether they were a DSL or deputy designated safeguarding lead (DDSL) to enable analysis by role.

In order to ensure that the Teacher Tapp panel reflects the teacher population as a whole more accurately, responses are weighted using data from the School Workforce Census and, for independent school teachers, the Independent School Council's Annual Survey. Currently, overall responses are re-weighted by gender, age category, senior leadership status, phase of schooling and private versus state-funded (Teacher Tapp, 2022).

3.10. A note on terminology

Safeguarding practice – and education generally – employs a wide range of terms and acronyms that are not always accessible to a general readership. Where possible, we will describe these in simple terms or use generic descriptors. DSLs/DDSLs in schools and colleges often have other or additional titles as members of senior leadership teams. Examples include the Director of Wellbeing and Inclusion or Behaviour Lead. For simplicity and to maintain anonymity, we have used DSL, Senior Leader or Trust Safeguarding Lead as descriptors where needed. Likewise, when referring to interviewees from safeguarding partnerships or other relevant agencies across local authorities or VRUs, we will use simple generic terms, such as Strategic Lead, Safeguarding Lead, Local Authority Manager or similar. Geographical references will be restricted to regions or omitted for the same reasons.

Where we refer to operational working, we generally mean interactions between professionals based on specific cases or concerns, particularly in relation to referrals to children's services; these may involve decision-making related to referral outcomes or interventions for an individual. Strategic working is decision-making related to approaches that may affect a wider population, either in relation to a group of children or a community, or interventions designed to target a specific identified issue affecting more than one child, e.g. exclusions for knife carrying.

3.11. Advisory group

We invited five individuals with expertise in safeguarding and education to support our research, drawing on the research team's knowledge and contacts across education and safeguarding. The purpose of the advisory group was threefold:

- To provide us, the project team, with expert input and additional expertise to guide our research design
- To contribute to our qualitative insight through expert responses to the research questions
- To bring their expert knowledge to the findings and to shape the insights for policy and practice in safeguarding in education with respect to SV.

The advisory board was consulted on an ad hoc basis throughout the research process, and it supported us in recruiting participants for the interviews. Several of the board members also participated in interviews to provide an expert overview of the research questions.

In addition, we recruited a young person with lived experience of violence to provide insights from the perspective of young people to shape the research and insights for policy and practice.

3.12. Membership

Name	Role/expertise	Organisation
Demetri Addison	Young advisor with lived experience of youth violence	N/A
Steven Baguley	Education and Transition into Adulthood Lead	NWG Network
Emma Bradshaw	Executive Principal	Alternative Learning Trust
Sarah Johnson	President	PRUsAP – The Voice of Alternative Provision
Jon le Fevre	Safeguarding and Leadership Professional Guide	N/A

Sara McCartan	Head of Service, Adolescent Service, Children's Services	Blackpool

3.13. Limitations

The rapid nature and timeframe of the RES can limit the breadth and depth of the evidence gathered. We managed the limitations of this approach by including grey literature to widen the scope of the RES and drawing on the wider team's prior knowledge of the literature to retrieve high-quality, relevant evidence for the review.

As with all qualitative research, the size of the sample is a limitation. While we were able to recruit participants from across different regions of England and Wales, these were not evenly distributed, and they often held different roles in safeguarding partnerships. This made it more challenging to identify specific areas of practice. We interviewed safeguarding professionals in Wales and the North East but were not able to recruit interveiwees working in education settings. The sample was self-selecting and, therefore, may represent practitioners who are generally more engaged in research and reflective practice and may not be representative of other safeguarding professionals. A number of interviewees working across local authorities or safeguarding partnerships suggested that in their work, they encountered a wider range of frontline safeguarding practitioners who were perhaps less interested in engaging fully with safeguarding partnerships, particularly at a strategic level. Further research to reach a wider range of participants and enable greater comparison between areas would build upon the approach here.

4. Findings

Question 1: System mapping. Where do schools, colleges and alternative provision sit in the serious violence safeguarding system across England and Wales?

a) What local partnership models exist to facilitate the involvement of education settings?

b) How is safeguarding in education settings governed?

c) What is the typical pathway for a child if the risk of violence is identified within education? How does this vary regionally?

Rapid evidence synthesis findings

There is minimal reference to serious violence in current safeguarding policy and guidance and little evidence as to how education should perform its role in safeguarding responses to serious violence in practice.

Our literature review did not yield many findings related to how safeguarding processes are applied in practice. Three reports we reviewed showed that education was seen as an important part of the safeguarding system but as a non-statutory partner. Some specifications on how safeguarding partnership processes should work in principle were set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2023); Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive (DfE, 2024b); and Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance (DfE, 2024a).

The current statutory guidance for schools and colleges in England, Keeping Children Safe in Education, advises that all school staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities, including awareness of child protection policies, signs of abuse, neglect, exploitation and child-on-child abuse (DfE, 2024a). Content that relates to child-on-child concerns and violence, in particular, focuses on sexual violence and sexual harassment. References to SV involving children are covered only briefly in Section 29 (p. 12) and Section 46, which summarises the indicators that may signal children are at risk from, or are involved with, SV crime. Further brief information on a huge range of safeguarding issues, such as child abduction, child criminal exploitation (CCE), cybercrime, homelessness, prevent duties and SV, are provided in an appendix to the guidance, Appendix B (DfE, 2024a:148-169). This guidance is used alongside Working Together to Safeguard Children, which references SV as an aspect of EFH and references the need for specified authorities to consult education in the preparation of their strategy for preventing and reducing SV (HM Government, 2023).

The Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive report (DfE, 2024b) recognises the important role of education in children's lives, stating that there are valuable insights that should have a voice in safeguarding arrangements. The recent Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (DfE, 2024e) has advised that education should remain a listed relevant agency, placing it as a mandatory participant in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements rather than as a statutory partner.

A lack of clarity around the definitions of serious youth violence and responses to it, leads to challenges for designated Safeguarding Leads in understanding how to apply guidance.

The literature review was more fruitful in yielding findings related to challenges with the current application of safeguarding systems, in particular, challenges deriving from understanding the definition of serious youth violence and relating to data sharing between agencies.

As described within the introduction, there is no clear definition of serious youth violence, and this makes safeguarding a difficult task for those with direct responsibilities, such as DSLs. Keeping Children Safe in Education states that "abuse, neglect, exploitation, and safeguarding issues are rarely standalone events and cannot be covered by one definition or one label alone. In most cases, multiple issues will overlap" (DfE, 2024a:11). For example, the inclusion of harmful sexual behaviours (HSBs) into the definition of violence is complex, and there are resulting difficulties for DSLs and other safeguarding professionals in responding to the nuances associated with complaints of HSB, with schools particularly found to struggle with understanding the microaggressions of sexual harm (Lloyd & Walker, 2023). Lloyd and Walker's (2023) in-depth analysis of 14 school audits and assessments on how schools dealt with HSBs highlights how policies and procedures can be in place, but how these are interpreted can cause problems between partner agencies if they disagree with safeguarding thresholds. The detailed definition of violence and abusive behaviours is extensive in the Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive (DfE, 2024b) policy statement and an extended definition is appropriate for LSPs and non-statutory partners to have the same thresholds for what is considered violence and requires a safeguarding intervention.

In addition, there is a lack of specific guidance that dictates the governance structures and workings of LSPs with education and other partners (Griffin, 2023). Griffin's (2023) report highlights how LSPs within Croydon were not sure about what other processes and panels were in place with statutory and non-statutory partners, leading to a potential lack of action, as they did not want to duplicate the work of other teams. The lack of specific guidance, therefore, results in variances in effective collaborative working from the strategic to the operational level, particularly regarding how concerns are raised and processed within safeguarding systems and the ability of partners, such as education, to meaningfully contribute to decision-making and support (The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2024).

There are continuing challenges around data sharing between agencies.

The Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2023) report recommended that there is a need for strong leadership and timely decision-making between education, the police and local authorities (HM Government, 2023). Filkin et al. (2022) and Islington Council (2020) also agree that collaboration among educators, criminal justice practitioners and other services is crucial for diverting children from SV. A cohesive approach to youth safety requires proper regulation, mutual support and appropriate organisations. The JTAI reports all advocated for strong multi-agency partnerships, stating that these are key to addressing SV and criminal exploitation, with clear communication, good reporting and governance stressed (Longworth et al., 2024; Macdonald et al., 2024; Marshall et al., 2023; McSherry et al., 2024; Old et al., 2024; Winter et al., 2024). The literature, therefore, underscores the critical importance of effective information sharing and record-keeping in compliance with data protection regulations to support safeguarding efforts (DfE, 2024b).

Neaverson and Lake's (2023) study on multi-agency approaches to county line gangs illustrates the issues of data sharing within multi-agency partnerships. They found that individuals from these partnerships are struggling with what data they are allowed to share and are hampered by others who are unwilling to share. One of their participants sums this up, "I seem to spend most of my time trying to tick boxes to get people to share information to protect children and keep trying to say GDPR allows this" (p. 66). They found that the representation of all relevant services in discussions about at-risk youth is essential for a comprehensive response (Neaverson & Lake, 2023).

Most of the academic research on specific issues, such as county lines or HSBs, states that the DSL would be the singular person within a school environment that all concerns would be raised with, either by other teachers or by school students themselves. DSLs are not always sure of whether concerns should be raised with the safeguarding multi-agency teams or referred to children's services. Examples focusing on HSBs describe a cause for concern around the clarity of raising specific safeguarding concerns for HSBs (Lloyd, 2019; 2020). Procedures focused mainly on identifying and reporting criminal activity rather than supporting those involved and/or including family members. Firmin et al.'s (2019) study investigated how HSBs are addressed within schools. Data was gathered from multiple schools and included reviews of incident logs, policies and procedures, case reviews, observations, and focus groups of children, staff and multi-agency practitioners. This high-quality study found that although policies exist for dealing with HSBs, each partner agency adapts these according to its own requirements, resulting in a lack of a uniform approach to responding to incidents within schools.

A further example of where data-sharing processes fail is posed by Baguley (2020). In an internal scoping report, Baguley found that further education (FE) colleges (post-16) had significant concerns about the consistency and timeliness of information sharing from schools regarding vulnerable children and young people. There were also concerns about then engaging with the transition to post-18 adult support, as there was so little support available for them to refer to. The colleges consulted stress that government

guidance is needed to articulate what data is expected when students transition (Baguley, 2020).

Qualitative findings

Schools are playing an increasing role in safeguarding children at risk of serious violence, and there is a sense that the risks are increasing in scale and scope.

Interviewees across both school settings and local authorities or safeguarding partnership agencies all recognised the central role that schools and colleges play in identifying children at risk of SV and referring those children to appropriate services. Schools are the arena where adults have the most interactions with children and young people outside the home, with multiple opportunities to observe and identify risks.

"They're the people who have the most contact [with] our children and young people … they know our young people probably the best out of everyone else, from a professional perspective".

- Violence Reduction Coordinator, VRU, England

School leaders and DSLs reported increasing safeguarding demands and taking on a larger role in prevention work due to the lack of, or inaccessibility of, external services. They also spoke of policy changes that increased the scope of their responsibilities, for example, the reduction of the age of inclusion in domestic abuse definitions from 18 to 16 and behaviour changes from both pupils and parents that demonstrated increasingly complex social issues. Some interviewees referenced conflicting guidance for schools around attendance, for example, having to code children who were accessing online learning or tutoring as absent or being directed not to ask for medical evidence from parents or carers in the event of absence from school despite potential safeguarding concerns linked to non-attendance.

Interviewees shared a range of concerns related to safeguarding and SV. Several DSLs working in settings and areas where there were higher levels of serious youth violence talked about concerns around the apparent normalisation of violence in some communities and the experiences of some children and young people growing up. As a result, they faced challenges in separating behaviour and safeguarding concerns where incidents could be seen as a result of children being drawn into criminality or exploitation or the result of children seeking to resolve more typical relationship problems by fighting.

Safeguarding Leads often referenced complex cases involving vulnerable children with additional learning needs, experiences of trauma and sexual exploitation, some of which have led to knife crime and prison. Several talked of the impact of gangs, gambling and domestic violence, as well as drug and alcohol issues and vaping, both in and around school settings.

The rise in mental health conditions among children and young people has been well documented (NHS Digital, 2023; Plant Yng Nghymru/Children in Wales, 2025) and was mentioned several times as having had a significant impact on a range of behaviours. This can be associated with persistent absence, which can also lead to increased vulnerability of children to the risk of harm from violence or exploitation (Gill et al., 2024).

"If the students miss so much education, if their attendance is relatively poor, the likelihood of us being able to support them is unrealistic."

- FE, DSL, North West

Another area creating a demand for schools is an increase in complaints from parents. One Youth Justice interviewee in London specifically referenced the impact of the government's encouragement of parents to report schools to Ofsted if they were not happy with their education provision. A local authority officer in children's services in Wales spoke of a lack of parental understanding around normal child development and felt that families have an increased expectation of special intervention in response to any need identified, whether or not it was what was required. This all creates an additional demand on school staff.

Another common theme raised was the impact of trauma on children and young people and how often this was a factor in them becoming involved in violence. One primary school headteacher just summarised the growing issue as "we've got less staff around to support greater needs".

Alternative provision and pupil referral units play a vital role in education, but designated Safeguarding Leads report concerns about managing safeguarding risks and accountability, particularly when children are at risk of being exploited or becoming involved in violence.

Some schools had good relationships with APs but were also clear that they retained responsibility for safeguarding the children from their school who attended AP, carrying out regular compliance checks and visits, as well as maintaining regular contact with AP staff to monitor attendance. This could be a significant challenge. A number of DSLs spoke of their concerns around the growth of unregistered APs, with one DSL in the West Midlands describing their reluctance to send children to an AP that was "inadequate in all areas".

School leaders in APs themselves described some parents being eager to send their children to them when relationships with mainstream schools had broken down or the child's behaviour had become increasingly challenging to manage at home. However, AP leaders were also clear that taking on children with experience of violence was not straightforward, and they weren't always equipped to manage this risk, "We just can't take [them] on … we're not specialist provision".

One pupil referral unit (PRU) leader interviewed spoke of the positive relationships they had with local mainstream schools and the work they did to support them with

preventive interventions. It was also clear that some mainstream DSLs felt there was a real risk in sending children or young people to a setting where they were likely to be alongside other children or young people who had been exposed to violence. There was a fear from one Trust Safeguarding Lead that "those behaviours become more ingrained".

There was a strong sense across all the interviews that attending school was a strong protective factor against children becoming involved in SV, but that there remained challenges within the education system in terms of ensuring provision that was most suitable for those identified as being at risk of violence. Alternative and specialist provisions were described as being at capacity in every area we encountered, from primary upwards. As a result, mainstream schools are managing behaviours and issues related to SV that previously they perhaps would have passed to more specialist support settings, in what one national safeguarding expert described as "safeguarding creep".

Further education colleges reported feeling less connected to the wider education and safeguarding system, describing delayed or selective information sharing and being left out of invitations to strategic engagement opportunities.

There were noticeable differences between mainstream schools and FE colleges in terms of strategic engagement in safeguarding, with several commenting on the perceived exclusion of FE colleges, either by design or oversight. Nevertheless, a similar proportion of 16-18-year-olds attend FE colleges as attend state-funded schools (DfE, 2024), and they have a clear role in supporting and tackling SV. One interviewee blamed this apparent disconnect on the perception of FE as being of less importance than schools as an academic option. Two interviewees at FE colleges highlighted the poor transfer of information around safeguarding concerns from some schools when students were transitioning to college, either by omission of information or delays.

A school-based interviewee in the South West of England spoke very highly of FE providers in terms of the prevention work that colleges do, describing pastoral care and support as "exemplary". However, they also highlighted that many children didn't have access to that college provision as a result of poverty and a lack of the required qualifications. Another interviewee based in FE in the South East of England described the greater flexibility of provision and timetabling in colleges as posing a challenge, even for tracking attendance.

Education is not currently a statutory partner in safeguarding partnerships, and levels of engagement in partnerships vary significantly across areas.

There is variation in the models of LSCPs across England and Wales. In some areas, they relate to a single local authority; in others, they cover two or more. Schools and colleges that frequently work with children living across several local authorities,

therefore, may have to engage with multiple LSCPs. In addition, there are some cooperative models, such as the London Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Greater Manchester Safeguarding Partnership. These pan-authority models support the individual LSCPs by developing resources and protocols to support multi-agency working and promote the sharing of best practices.

DSLs interviewed reported a significant range of levels of involvement with LSCPs. DSLs were most positive about partnerships when they were highly engaged and felt consulted and where they reported working closely with multi-agency partners. One Trust Safeguarding Lead in the North West felt that they had made significant progress through collaboration with the local authority by showing initiative and reaching out themselves to establish the representation of education in the safeguarding partnership and its subgroups.

Where DSLs were least positive, they did not feel their expertise was recognised or sufficiently valued, and they had limited strategic involvement. Some described struggling to engage even at an operational level. Many said that information sharing could be poor, and one Trust Safeguarding Lead even described the state of affairs as "quite dire". A school Safeguarding Lead in Cornwall felt that SV concerns were neglected at a strategic level due to a lack of perceived need.

One local authority Safeguarding Lead in Wales felt that the safeguarding boards "don't function to drive safeguarding for Wales as they should". Nonetheless, interviewees in Wales generally spoke of an evolving sense of partnership with education as a "critical friend". They recognised the depth of practitioner knowledge and the need to coordinate around managing risk outside the home and within the community. They were particularly focused on the opportunities for schools to be involved in discussions around the development of early help services.

"At a strategic level, [we] brought our partners with us on that as well in recognition and kind of very clearly state into them that we can't do this on our own. You have a far better understanding of what goes on a day-to-day basis in [the] school environment [than] we ever will".

- Local Authority Children's Services, Wales

Interviewees from both partnerships and education described multiple meetings, reference groups, sub-groups and forums, some strategic and some operational, covering a wide range of safeguarding issues. None of these were mentioned as specifically focused on serious youth violence, although there was a focus on gang activity in some areas. A number of interviewees felt that meetings of these groups were not always effective and could be seen as "talking shops" with fluid membership that often waned over time. One DSL in the North West spoke of the frustration of going to a lot of strategy meetings but not being fully apprised of relevant information prior to serious incidents, which would have enabled them to offer better support to the children beforehand. A Senior Leader in the East Midlands blamed "perhaps quite naive … knowledge of how the education system works and what actually is going to impact".

It was also evident that following the 2023 updates to Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2023), many safeguarding partnerships were making changes and increasing efforts to improve engagement with education. Participants spoke positively about meetings where they were able to discuss cases and concerns and receive advice and support, particularly referencing police or youth justice interactions. However, one secondary school Senior Leader in the East Midlands wasn't alone in suggesting that "if you weren't aware of it, you weren't included in it". Officials also spoke of JTAIs as being influential in driving improved engagement with education in terms of multi-agency working, though the amount of progress varied by area.

Safeguarding by education settings of children and young people impacted by violence often relies on informal relationships and information sharing with police or youth offending teams.

Police officers based in schools, such as Safer Schools Officers, support close relationships between schools and the police or youth offending teams. In Wales, a Youth Support Manager described police officers linked to schools as a really important "trusted contact" for schools. A number of DSLs in areas where there were high levels of violence and/or where there was a VRU coordinator or similar also spoke positively about relationships with the police. They often spoke of informal connections, being on first-name terms and exchanging messages regularly to ensure that information was shared.

"So although [schools are] not statutory partners in the serious violence duty, they're critical to it".

- ***Youth Justice Service, North West***

Relationships between the police and schools were described as less strong in areas where the perceived risk levels were lower, particularly some more remote or rural areas.

Designated Safeguarding Leads remain key decision makers in their settings, but safeguarding teams at the school and multi-academy trust level are growing larger, reflecting growing responsibilities.

The DSL retains responsibility for decision-making on safeguarding on a daily basis in individual settings. All DSL interviewees indicated that they were members of the senior leadership team, and in some cases, they were full-time Safeguarding Leads without teaching responsibilities. Many reported safeguarding teams growing larger in response to need, particularly in secondary schools and colleges, with Pastoral and Behaviour Leads often being offered level 2 or 3 safeguarding training. One setting in the East Midlands reported that "the entire senior leadership team are trained as DSLs".

Many multi-academy trusts (MATs) have a full-time safeguarding lead overseeing and supporting DSLs in individual schools, but those interviewed were clear that it was the DSL who made operational decisions. There were a variety of perspectives in terms of

policies, with one lead who referenced a detailed 63-page safeguarding policy intended to cover every eventuality and another who specifically rejected having a trust-wide policy to avoid "putting tariffs on behaviour". There was a desire to avoid fixed consequences, such as permanent exclusion for possession of a bladed article in school, in response to incidents where flexibility based on context might be necessary.

In the case of serious safeguarding concerns, particularly those related to SV and/or with a risk of exclusion, DSLs reported seeking advice from colleagues and Headteachers, as well as wider networks where appropriate. There was some perceived tension between managing safeguarding and behavioural concerns and balancing the potential school-level risks with those of the individual child. The Safeguarding Leads interviewed overwhelmingly sought to keep children within school, but some professionals external to schools spoke of some DSLs and Headteachers being "risk averse" and more inclined to exclude in the event of violent behaviours or, for example, a bladed article being brought into school. One Local Authority Coordinator in the North West specifically referenced a working group to prevent suspensions and exclusions and support schools in managing this tension.

There is no typical pathway for a child identified at risk, with a range of terminology and processes for referral across local authorities.

There were some common elements to pathways described in interviews, with frequent mentions of referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub[2] or via the "front door". However, it is difficult to identify any typical pathways across different local authorities, and this is an area of significant frustration for practitioners. There is no current clear pathway for safeguarding responses to SV, meaning that responses vary beyond the point of referral.

Terminology and processes differ in each local authority, from whether or not there is a single point of referral (sometimes referred to as the front door or similar) to whether referrals are made through an online portal or via telephone. Practitioners often expressed concern about the challenge of knowing where to refer, particularly when working across multiple authorities. Referrals are linked to the authority in which a child lives rather than the location of the school, and a different range of services may be available. This can be dependent upon commissioning arrangements of service provision in each local authority.

[2] The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), sometimes called the front door, is a multi-agency team that provides a single point of access for referrals to children's services. They may meet regularly as a group to share information and improve decision-making when there are concerns for a child. The MASH also responds to child protection concerns for children at risk of significant harm. They may request further information from education representatives to support referrals.

"They do things the same hypothetically, but the actual way in which that's executed is quite different. Also, the level of support the individual schools get is quite different according to which authority they're in".

- School Safeguarding Lead, North West England

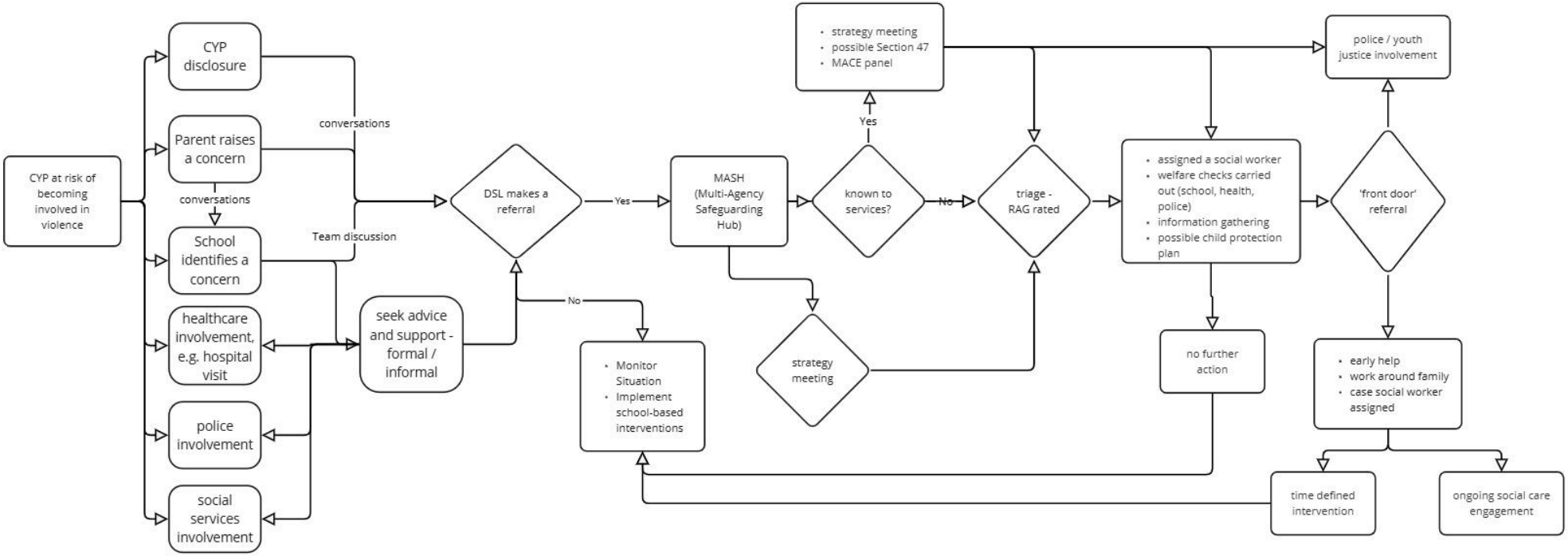
Nevertheless, it was clear that the DSLs interviewed had built up a good understanding of the procedures and services available to them in their area. Many of them referenced having worked in the same school or the same area for several years, enabling them to build this experience and knowledge. This contrasted with the uncertainty created by inconsistency in the management of referrals due to the absence of, or frequent turnover of, case workers or lack of communication about the progress or ending of a referral.

Based on interviews with both DSLs in education settings and those working within safeguarding partnerships or local authority safeguarding roles, we have drawn up a composite example pathway that illustrates possible processes that follow when a child is identified as being at risk of involvement in violence [Figure 1].

Our young expert advisor with lived experience provided helpful comments on the pathway example, emphasising the importance of also identifying children and young people on the periphery of violence or criminal activity for targeted preventative work. This requires teachers and education staff to be very aware of early indicators and the wider factors likely to influence children, such as who they associate with outside school. The role of community leaders, trusted members of the wider community around children and young people, and their families was also highlighted. This was particularly important when families may be reluctant to engage with professionals either linked to the police or education. Universal services and whole-population-based interventions in response to escalating concerns in a local context or among specific groups were sometimes seen as valuable but often missing due to a lack of resources or funding.

As part of our review, the London Borough of Croydon's Early Help and Children's Social Care services team, specifically the Adolescent Support team, provided an example of the model pathway they use in response to a concern being raised about a child at risk of violence, which shows the range of services and activities that might be involved [Figure 2].

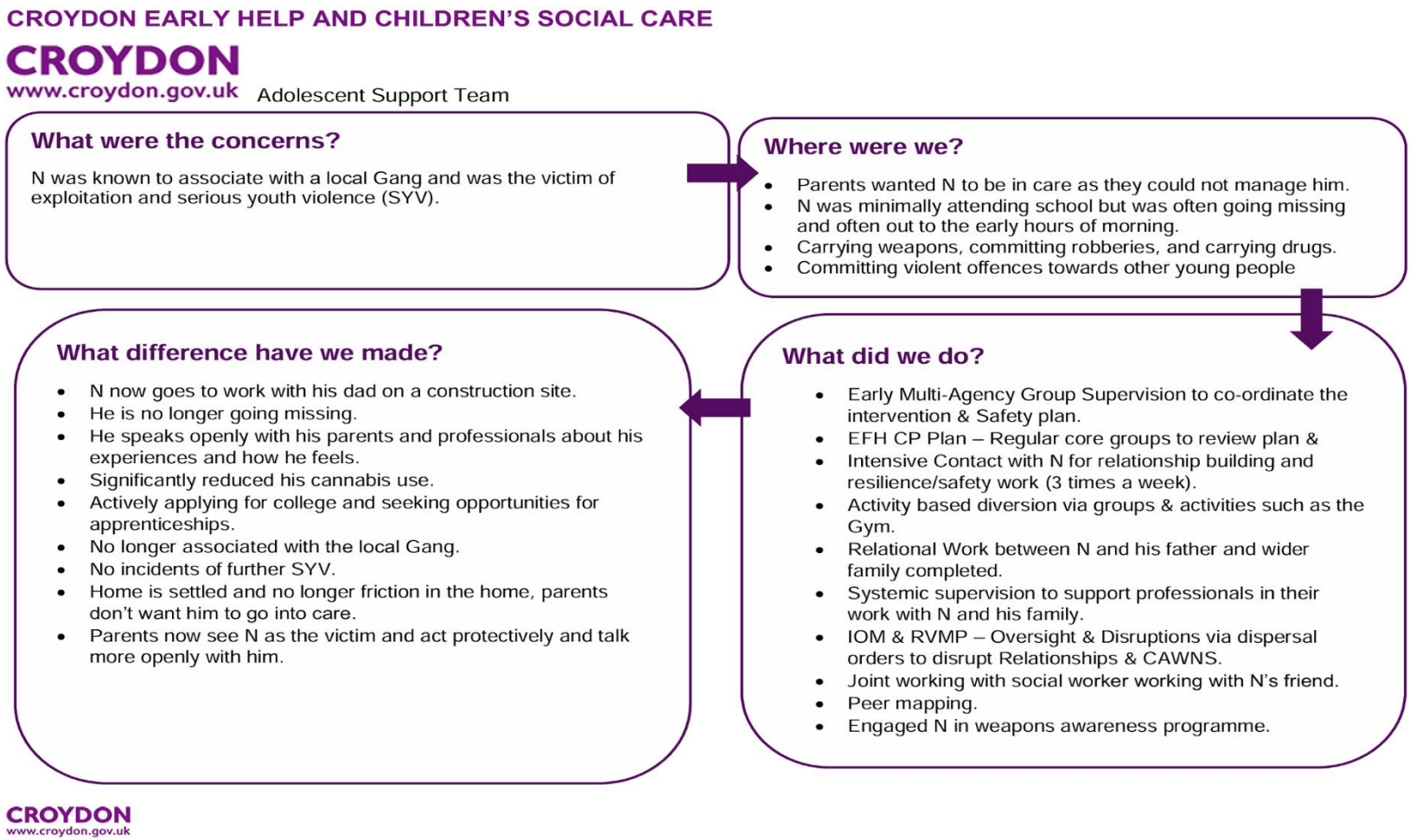
Figure 1 – An example of an indicative possible local authority safeguarding pathway based on interviews



Definitions

Section 47 – a child protection enquiry to determine if a child is at risk of significant harm. This may lead to a child protection plan or the identification of a child in need.
MASH – Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. Often the first stage of a referral.
MACE – Multi-Agency Child Exploitation panels with representatives from agencies including children's social care, youth justice services, police.
Early help – intervention and support for families at the earliest point of challenges. It is intended to prevent escalation.
Child protection plan - DSLs are responsible for ensuring that child protection files are kept up to date and coordinating with children's social care and other services, including for early help offers.
Education representatives may be invited to attend meetings, asked to provide supporting information about child protection for Section 47 enquiries, or to make referrals.

Figure 2 – An example from the Croydon Adolescent Support team, which shared a walkthrough that outlines the pathway in response to concerns around a young person known to associate with a local gang and as a victim of exploitation and serious violence.



Question 2: Effectiveness. To what extent are schools, colleges and alternative provision settings in England and Wales effectively fulfilling their safeguarding role to prevent serious youth violence?

a) What support and training do designated safeguarding leads in these settings receive specifically related to violence do DSLs in these settings receive?

b) To what extent do all staff in these settings (beyond just the DSL) fulfil their roles in safeguarding children from violence?

c) What indicators are most useful in assessing the effectiveness of education safeguarding practice between settings/areas?

Rapid evidence synthesis findings

There is limited robust evidence on the impact of safeguarding responses to serious violence within schools, colleges and AP settings, though there are some case studies by formal review bodies that describe effective practice.

Reflecting the findings of the Child Safeguarding Thematic Review Serious Youth Violence report, our RES found limited robust evidence on the impact of responses to SV within schools, colleges and AP settings. However, our literature review did highlight several case studies where the practice was described by formal bodies as effective – in particular, in reports on JTAI. We summarise some of these cross-cutting features from case studies of effective practice before reporting on two other themes in the wider literature – the importance of building trusting relationships with children and strong pastoral support for children in education settings.

As part of the RES, we reviewed six JTAI reports to examine how SV responses and interventions can be more effective in schools. These reports do not provide evidence of rigorous impact evaluations of interventions, and therefore, their guidance and examples on effectiveness should be interpreted and applied cautiously. Nevertheless, they provide useful information on the types of interventions that are being used across England and Wales.

Results from the RES indicated the importance of effective multi-agency working but that this is operationalised in different ways. Within Lancashire (Old et al., 2024:6), there is a district team which liaises between education and safeguarding partners, identifying new concerns and taking on the responsibility to share information across

services. From this team, sub-groups are created and tasked with providing interventions for potential areas of concern, such as knife crime, and they utilise the youth services provision across the county to ensure there are safe spaces for children in the evenings and on weekends. Early identification of vulnerability is a strength in the county, and a child-centred, trauma-informed approach has been actively embedded across all local services (Old et al., 2024). The JTAI of Leeds report described the effectiveness of the Violence Reduction Partnership research unit, which gathers data from multiple sources, enabling partners to access information about what types of violence are affecting children in the local area. This has allowed them to introduce meaningful interventions based on the data that had been gathered and reviewed. One such example included identifying multiple needs and ensuring that they had been addressed before a successful re-introduction to school (Longworth et al., 2024).

While most reports struggle to identify measurable outcomes from their SV interventions, the RES identified that within Merton's JTAI report into effective multi-agency partnerships, it was reported that their targeted initiatives have reduced knife-enabled violence by 8% and serious violent robberies by 16%. This was reported to be linked to strong multi-agency relationships and coordinated care for children at risk (McSherry et al., 2024).

In the absence of collaborative multi-agency working with LSPs at the strategic level, our findings indicated the potential responses that can be driven by single agencies, such as schools, in developing their own localised approach. For example, in Somerset, the JTAI (Winter et al., 2024) did not find many effective practices; however, they did find that some schools had set up their own responses to violence, working closely with Police Community Support Officers, family intervention workers, early years specialists and mental health services to support children at risk of exclusion.

The collection and synthesis of multi-agency data as part of risk assessments and decision-making has been a reported challenge in many individual reviews of significant incidents and in national reports (Griffin et al., 2023). However, while some reports indicated positive approaches that had engaged education as part of the wider safeguarding system, there is still a lack of evidence of the impact of these approaches regarding what is working well for children and young people in terms of keeping them safe and reducing their risk of SV (Old et al., 2024).

Much of the RES literature emphasised the importance of seeing education as wider than educational staff (e.g. school teachers). Additionally, the reports indicated the critical role of school nurses in connecting those not in mainstream schools or placed in external boroughs, and it was found that there is good information sharing from health to other partner agencies, including education (McSherry et al., 2024). The role of the school nurse allows for access to children within the community, as well as in schools. School nurses can conduct comprehensive risk assessments, acting as a central contact between multi-agency safeguarding teams, important other health agencies and education (Clark et al., 2018; Littler, 2019). The RES highlights the role school nurses

play in safeguarding and the potential to deliver prevention work in schools to prevent future violence and harm.

A culture of belonging in education settings can support trusting relationships that both enable children to seek help and build confidence in staff to identify and respond to concerns in a way that may reduce the likelihood of violence.

Alongside individual JTAIs, we also reviewed a small amount of evidence suggesting that trauma-informed approaches can support professionals in identifying early behaviours that could lead to children becoming involved in SV.

The RES found that connectedness and trust in the teachers are particularly important when exploring relationships and sexual education, as when children feel safe in the environment, they may be more likely to ask for support with harmful relationships themselves. A study based on school bonding and the trajectory of offending for 4,049 children across 42 schools found that pupils who feel more connected to their school and feel that staff would advocate for them were also involved in fewer violent incidents, such as fights with peers (Higgins et al., 2020). Similarly, in a cross-sectional quantitative study, Jankowiak et al. (2020:1) found that "the likelihood of suffering physical and/or sexual dating violence decreased when school social support increased". In Firmin et al.'s (2019) mixed methods study addressing barriers to reporting abusive behaviours in schools, they found that when school systems provided clear pathways for students to disclose concerns to staff, students felt supported and not judged. Firmin's (2020) study expanded on this point, finding that where girls had experienced or witnessed violence, disclosures were more likely when they believed someone would handle the allegation effectively. Therefore, trust in teachers and DSLs to handle disclosures seems to be an important component for children to disclose incidents or concerns.

Staff confidence in responding to HSB was also increased if the school had an effective policy and a strong pastoral approach to care (Firmin et al., 2019). Additionally, good relationships and clear onward referral processes to multi-agency safeguarding partnerships are also important in increasing the confidence of education staff (Firmin et al., 2019). Lloyd et al.'s (2019) mixed methods study focusing on barriers to responding to HSBs in schools found that children are more likely to disclose violence and abuse to education staff when they feel that their school responds effectively.

In a report on how the London Borough of Islington is tackling children's involvement in violence, Islington Council (2020) describes how the Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools programme links schools with targeted support for issues including school exclusion, drugs and alcohol, and gangs. Within Islington, it is recognised that to effectively be inclusive, there needs to be a whole-community approach, which includes schools fostering an environment in which all children feel safe. This is partially achieved

through staff being provided with in-depth training that helps them to understand the impact of complex trauma or adversity on children, with the aim of increasing confidence in identifying children at risk and being able to signpost to partners to mitigate those risks as quickly as possible. There is not yet sufficient robust evidence that trauma-informed practice works to reduce children's involvement in violence (YEF, n.d.), and we don't know how effective trauma-informed practice training for teachers is at preventing children's involvement in violence. However, the YEF is currently funding two randomised controlled trials to test trauma-informed practice in schools and its impact on violence to understand more about how trauma-informed principles might lead to targeted support that some children may need.

Qualitative findings

Designated Safeguarding Leads are extremely knowledgeable about their students and the local community and use this knowledge to support safeguarding work.

It is clear from the interviews held with practitioners in education settings and from many of those working in safeguarding partnerships and other agencies that the majority of DSLs take their role and responsibility for safeguarding children and young people extremely seriously. While it is possible that our sample represents the most engaged and committed practitioners, a common theme throughout our interview responses, including from those working in local authorities, was the high level of commitment that DSLs have to supporting and protecting the children in their care.

Those working in areas of high levels of violence often expressed huge concern for the children currently in their care and awareness of their fears.

"I had one student … once said to me that he leaves home every morning not knowing if he'll make it home".

- DSL, London

There were, nonetheless, some concerns about DSLs or Headteachers who were considered more "risk averse" or for whom "the thought of a child being involved in violence is really quite terrifying" (advisory group member), but overwhelmingly, there is a perception that some Safeguarding Leads and Senior Leaders in schools are stepping in to fill gaps in service provision, particularly around early intervention and support.

"Teachers know their students inside out".

- Senior Leader, South East England

Schools are perceived to be extremely knowledgeable about the children in their care and the local context in which they operate. This enables them to have a strong understanding of many of the issues and influences, but their effectiveness in safeguarding may be complicated by fragmented service offers or a lack of adequate

involvement in local safeguarding practices. One Trust Leader in the East of England complained that they hadn't been included in a Section 47 enquiry[3] despite their knowledge of the family and child.

Several DSLs suggested that some children and adults saw school as a "safe place", and this was recognised by local authority staff, who talked of the value of individuals in schools forming good relationships with people who are often very wary of professionals, particularly the police or social workers. However, they also recognised some children and families were less willing to engage with professionals in schools or other agencies due to previous negative experiences or concerns relating to the impact of that interaction.

Some leaders were extremely active in the communities around their schools, but they were also clear about the limitations of their role in safeguarding when many of the causes of violence were outside of school influences.

Teaching staff are playing a larger role than they used to in safeguarding processes that previously sat exclusively with designated safeguarding leads.

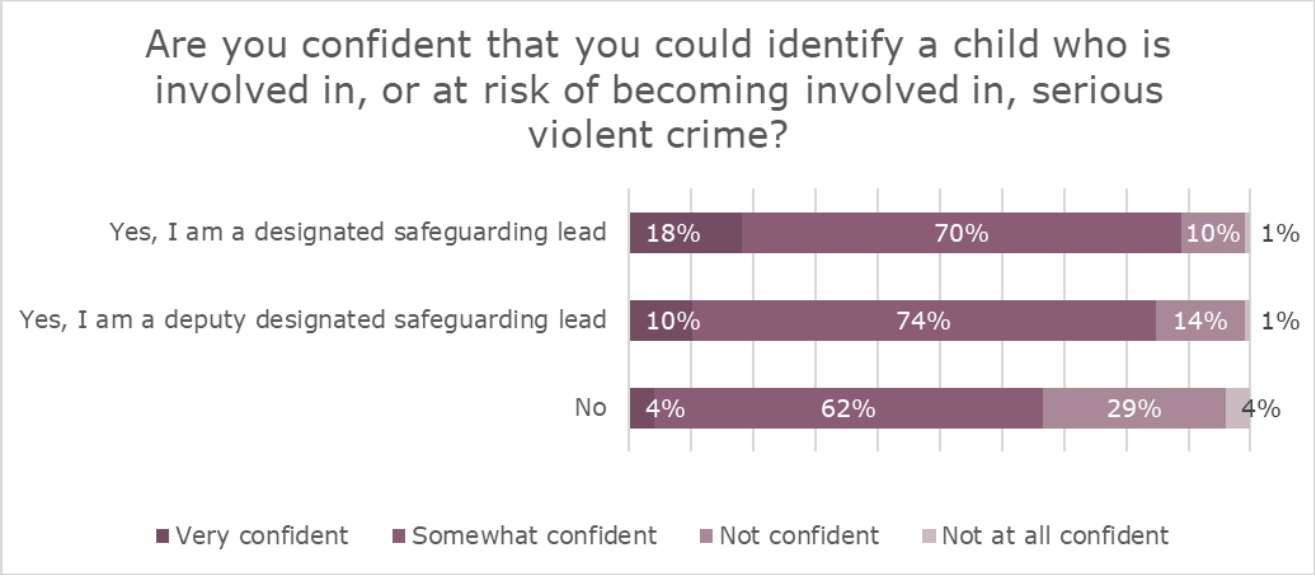
The DSLs who participated in the research almost unanimously believed that their staff members were generally very good at recognising indicators of risk and raising concerns. This was particularly the case in schools with high levels of identified risk, where all staff recorded information on the Child Protection Online Management System (CPOMS)[4]. Pastoral teams held an overview of concerns and Senior Leaders supported by identifying any patterns of behaviour and forming teams around the child to discuss and decide on the appropriate referral. In one trust, this was referred to as a "critical incident process". In these schools and colleges, there was an absolute belief that safeguarding went beyond the safeguarding team, especially when considering groups of children or young people considered to be at high risk. There was a commitment to sharing knowledge so that staff were aware of concerns.

These findings contrast with findings from the Teacher Tapp survey, in which only 6% of teachers responding were very confident that they could identify a child involved in or at risk of becoming involved in SV, although this rose to 17% of DSLs.

Seventy per cent of DSLs were somewhat confident that they could identify a child at risk of SV, but given the low levels of specific training, it is perhaps unsurprising that 33% of teachers who were not DSLs or DDSLs were not confident or not at all confident that they could identify children at risk of SV [Figure 3].

[3] A Section 47 enquiry is a child protection investigation to determine if a child is at risk of significant harm.
[4] CPOMS is software widely used by education settings to monitor safeguarding and pastoral issues https://www.cpoms.co.uk/

Figure 3 – Question answered by 6,811 teachers on 2 December 2024



Secondary teachers were far less confident than primary teachers in identifying children at risk, with 36% saying they were not confident or not at all confident, compared with 23% of primary teachers. Fourteen per cent of those in the most affluent schools (Q1) were very confident, compared to only 5% in the least (Q4). Similarly, only 16% of those in Q1 were not confident, while 24% in Q4 were not confident, and 2% admitted to being not at all confident. Confidence levels did not vary much regionally or by years of experience.

The question could not explore the reasons behind the responses, for example, what indicators they were relying on to identify risk where this was not based on a child sharing information. It is likely to be related to a level of understanding of the risk factors as included in Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2024a).

There were some DSLs and professionals working across safeguarding partnerships and in local authority roles who were concerned that some staff did see their responsibility ending with a referral. Staff in education providers feeling an increased sense of responsibility around holding risk in relation to children involved in SV was clearly articulated by several participants.

"We are finding an increasing need of staff who are saying, 'I just feel like someone's going to get stabbed on my watch'".

- DSL, West Midlands

Education for children about preventing involvement in SV seems to be primarily delivered through ad hoc assemblies or workshops. Although many schools and colleges referenced bringing in speakers to address children and young people on key topics, it was also apparent that teachers in the role of tutors or pastoral staff are also asked to deliver important preventative information, often of a sensitive nature. However, they are not specialist teachers, nor is there evidence that any specific or additional training is regularly provided around topics such as SV or exploitation. There is also limited

evidence that this work is effective in preventing or reducing involvement in SV (YEF, n.d.).

Schools and colleges often lack clear indicators to measure the effectiveness of safeguarding practices.

A robust, large-scale evaluation would be required to fully test the effectiveness of safeguarding practices, but currently, there seems to be little attention given to measuring effectiveness in education settings or, indeed, elsewhere.

While schools often spoke of meticulously recording and monitoring safeguarding incidents and concerns, none of the DSLs interviewed reported clear indicators being used to assess the effectiveness of safeguarding practices in supporting or protecting children. One primary DSL acknowledged that they'd never really thought about how to measure effectiveness. There was a lack of clarity around what indicators could be used, and although data was collected (predominantly via CPOMS in our sample) and used by some DSLs to consider patterns for individual students (e.g. across different lessons), very few were looking at safeguarding issues in relation to specific groups of children, for example, by ethnicity or gender. At a trust level, one had restructured its system in response to concerns about its ability to analyse data at a school level and to enable it to have a trust-level overview of issues. However, it was unclear whether this enabled the measurement of effectiveness rather than improved monitoring.

Several interviewees recognised the challenge of identifying appropriate indicators of effective safeguarding practice at the school or college level. One specifically questioned the use of the numbers of referrals as a measure, as a rise could be due to the better recognition of risk factors or an increase in the number of incidents, just as a decrease could reflect a failure to recognise signs or a decrease in the number of incidents. The importance of the specific context of each education setting was highlighted many times, with schools within trusts and local authorities having different student profile demographics. As a result, the differing local contextual safeguarding concerns of education providers often didn't reflect the picture generated by national data, making national data less useful and even potentially, according to one trust Safeguarding Lead, misleading.

Measuring effectiveness was raised as a particular challenge in terms of preventative work through early interventions or help. One interviewee queried how you could measure the success of an intervention if that very success meant that it prevented a measurable outcome. Nevertheless, there were teams in local authorities or justice that were looking at improving data information, including one exploring how it could work with schools on data around children at risk of exploitation in order to better understand the effectiveness of interventions. In London, one safeguarding partnership was specifically focusing on identifying and understanding disproportionality in the safeguarding system, including the overrepresentation of certain ethnicities in the justice service, particularly those identified as being involved with gangs.

Question 3: Barriers. What barriers currently exist to the timely identification of and support for children at risk of violence?

Rapid evidence synthesis findings

Our literature review found that the exclusion of education as a strategic partner in LSPs results in increased challenges in how education sectors are represented and included within governance structures. Our analysis indicated that there was a lack of safeguarding training for staff in education around raising concerns through the LSP. In addition, the RES identified challenges in navigating policies and procedures, particularly when there are conflicting and competing priorities within schools.

Staff working in schools and colleges lack training on multi-agency safeguarding processes, particularly in relation to serious violence prevention.

Despite the emphasis on safeguarding training (DfE, 2024a), within the Ofsted (2021) review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges report, some DSLs highlighted significant barriers to timely identification and support for children at risk of violence. One challenge is the lack of high-level training at the LSP level in addressing, managing and following up on allegations of a serious sexual nature (Ofsted, 2021). The JTAI report on multi-agency responses to serious youth violence also highlights the importance of training for education staff in understanding SV and CCE, as well as multi-agency support to keep children in school/education where possible, stating "children received better, more coordinated responses to their needs when education was seen as a protective factor" (Ofsted, 2024).

Sometimes, the challenges noted were about a lack of consideration about the schooling schedule, with updates published before the summer holidays rather than in September, which would allow them to plan staff inset days more effectively (Ofsted, 2021). This timing issue can delay the implementation of new safeguarding measures, further impacting the timely identification of and support for at-risk children.

Some challenges around lack of training applied to specific support that schools increasingly find themselves needing to provide for children. Young et al.'s (2019) mixed methods study on the development of interventions in schools to address HSBs found that there is an urgent need to improve the delivery of education. To do this, they suggest further training to empower teachers and that priority should be given to the integration of relationships and sex education (RSE) topics into the wider curriculum (Young et al., 2019). Focus groups conducted with 16-18-year-olds in Northern Ireland found that providing educators with enhanced resources and training focused on

domestic and sexual abuse, neglect and SV is essential to address the increase in relationship abuse and sexual violence (Maguire & Pentaraki, 2023). The findings encourage schools to deliver this education through dedicated departments and regularly scheduled lessons in order to strengthen the offer and embed it into the school culture (Bragg et al., 2022). Schools are also urged to collaborate with local specialist services, drawing on their expertise to help design and deliver resources (Firmin et al., 2019). Additionally, enabling teachers to have allocated time for preparation and training is advised as a key priority (Bragg et al., 2022).

It was noted within some studies that some educators do not prioritise pastoral education on safeguarding issues as a core responsibility (Meiksin et al., 2020; Ponsford et al., 2022). Several factors may contribute to their reluctance, including a limited capacity for teachers to participate in training and access suitable resources, as well as the competing demands of an extensive curriculum and school activities (Lloyd & Walker, 2023). This indicated that there is a wider issue of staff understanding their roles and responsibilities in relation to the protection of children and what is considered as a safeguarding issue, particularly regarding pathways and experiences of violence (Stephens & Sayer, 2021).

A lack of training leads to challenges in navigating policies and procedures.

To enable education staff to deliver an effective and consistent response, policies and procedures are key. However, these policies and procedures need to be effectively implemented with feedback provided across the system as to what is working well and where there are challenges. When examining safeguarding processes for schools reporting incidents of HSB, Lloyd (2019) found limited guidance for schools on how to respond to incidents of HSB beyond the initial referral. Additionally, referral pathways outlined in school safeguarding policies were not always utilised by schools when responding to cases of HSB (Firmin et al., 2019). Firmin et al.'s (2019) paper highlighted that education staff commonly noted that a referral would involve informing the DSL, who would then decide on how and if to escalate concerns externally (Lloyd & Bradbury, 2023). This suggests a wider policy issue around insufficient safeguarding policies that was also reflected in Lloyd (2019), where education staff felt their role in response and intervention ended at the point of internal referral to the DSL.

However, DSLs were also noted to be hesitant when making a safeguarding referral externally (Firmin et al., 2019), with reasons given such as fearing a breech in GDPR or not understanding whether the incident met the threshold for referrals. Lloyd's (2019) study agreed with this and found that schools were perceived by safeguarding professionals to be anxious about referring cases of HSB, with barriers additionally noted in relation to staff not having the skills and language required to discuss cases relating to sex and sexuality. Generally, there appears to be a lack of clearly identified routes through the safeguarding system, meaning that Safeguarding Leads and

practitioners do not always have an understanding of how safeguarding issues should be dealt with. In an analysis of survey data and qualitative interviews of parents, children and practitioners, many people often found navigating the system challenging and felt disempowered by the power dynamics in multi-agency meetings (Langhoff et al., 2024).

The transition from child to adult services can cause challenges for Safeguarding Leads due to a lack of knowledge, as well as budget cuts affecting services.

Additional challenges were found regarding transitions between years 11 and 12 and into adult services. The challenges associated with these were seen to be exacerbated by budget cuts. Cuts to services such as youth services and Connexions have significantly impacted colleges' abilities to support and safeguard 16-18-year-olds, particularly those not in employment, education or training (NEET) group (Baguley, 2020).

This links with wider research around adultification and victim blaming, which is a key feature within the recently published report on the findings from six JTAIs, which was carried out between September 2023 and May 2024 (Ofsted, 2024). Adultification is described as children being treated as adults due to their appearance and/or behaviours, which can lead to these children being considered offenders rather than victims (Appiah et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2024; Griffin, 2023; McSherry et al., 2024; Wroe, 2021). The report identifies the consequences of adultification, with this resulting in higher criminalisation "as children's needs for protection and a welfare approach are not recognised, and children are seen as responsible for their own problems" (Ofsted, 2024).

There is currently no requirement in Working Together (HM Government, 2023) for LSPs' annual safeguarding reports to report on transitional safeguarding responses, with this only likely to be reported on if the LSP has identified it as a key theme from their own reviews and audits.

Policies can sometimes lead to conflicting priorities for schools in terms of safeguarding.

Some of the literature we reviewed identified a number of studies which articulated that educational policies can directly oppose each other. For example, there is pressure on schools to demonstrate academic outcomes, which means that underperforming children with behaviours that could be seen as problematic, could be isolated temporarily or permanently suspended to 'game' the system (Parish et al., 2020:34). Smith's (2019) All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) report on Knife Crime, the Timpson (2020) Review of School Exclusion, and Martin-Denham's qualitative study on drug use and school exclusions all agree that some schools have used offrolling, a term to describe

strategically removing children from the school register when they are not expected to achieve academically.

Offrolling may be beneficial to schools financially and in terms of time spent supporting these children and, therefore, may benefit other children in the long term, but exclusion increases the vulnerability of children to involvement in or being at risk of SV (Brown et al., 2024; Smith, 2019). The APPG Knife Crime report (Smith, 2019) also found that achieving excellence in academic performance took precedence over putting time and resources into behavioural interventions or SEND provision in some schools, with pastoral care provisions, such as counsellors, being the first to be cut when budgets are tight (Smith, 2019).

Limited staff training and prioritisation is preventing the delivery of effective sex and relationships education, particularly around the related risks of violence and exploitation.

Providing further context on conflicting priorities, Maguire and Pentaraki (2023) found that education around domestic violence within relationships and sex education are usually secondary to other more academic aspects of the curriculum. Children across different schools and school types reported that they did not receive adequate education about domestic abuse, stating that teachers lacked training (Maguire & Pentaraki, 2023). This left the pupils feeling as though they could not seek help within the school environment (Maguire & Pentaraki, 2023). The challenge here is with understanding definitions around HSBs as sexual violence, as the thresholds for safeguarding may not be clear. For example, the statutory definition of domestic abuse focuses on harm for those aged 16 and over, potentially negating the experiences of those in relationships who are in school and under 16 (Kensit, 2024).

As discussed previously, the RES found evidence that schools with a welfare approach to relationship and sex education received more positive feedback from children, emphasising the need for supportive rather than punitive measures (Firmin, 2020; Higgins et al., 2020; Jankowiak, 2020; Lloyd & Bradbury, 2023; Lloyd & Walker, 2023). Conversely, Lloyd and Bradbury (2023) and Lloyd and Walker (2023) found that the normalisation of HSBs in schools and subsequent punitive measures discouraged children from reporting or disclosing.

The RES identified the importance of relationship and sex education, as girls in particular, are affected by SV through HSBs and relationship abuse. Better education in RSE within schools was linked to a better culture and safer environment for all children. The SaFE Project study highlighted significant gaps in FE provision, particularly the need for on-site sexual health and relationships services and staff training in safeguarding these areas (Young et al., 2019). These elements were deemed necessary by students, staff and health professionals and could be sustainably implemented to encourage safer sex and healthy relationships among young people in FE settings. Kensit (2024) likewise

concludes that accessible and inclusive relationship and sex education should be compulsory throughout all stages of academic and community learning and development and delivered by staff members who are adequately trained and who have the confidence to have sensitive and challenging discussions. Providing accessible and modernised training about relationship and sex education is crucial when trying to educate children on other forms of harm and risks, such as exploitation and SV, to enable them to identify the realities of local and national risks and how to respond should they or others be affected (Butler et al., 2024).

Qualitative findings

The availability and quality of training around serious violence and safeguarding in schools is variable, with the best training being closely linked to the local context of schools.

Numerous sources of general safeguarding training, including local authorities, LSPs, the police or youth justice teams, commercial organisations and consultancies, or voluntary organisations, were mentioned by interviewees. Some police or youth offending teams appear to be delivering a wide menu of workshops, training and awareness to schools; however, school staff reported varied experiences in terms of both availability and quality.

In England, Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2024) states that the DSL and any deputies should undergo training "to provide them with the knowledge and skills required to carry out the role", and this should be updated at least every two years. The training should include how to identify, understand and respond to specific needs that can increase the vulnerability of children as well as specific harms that can put them at risk. The guidance also states that training should include processes, procedures and responsibilities of other agencies, particularly local authority children's social care (HM Government, 2024:174-5). To ensure effectiveness, this requires clear pathways, protocols and processes at a local level, as safeguarding structures related to education involvement – alongside responses to safeguarding concerns, including sexual violence – can vary. The transparency and accessibility of such processes are therefore crucial.

Similar guidance is provided in Wales in Keeping Learners Safe, although this specifies that the Designated Safeguarding Person requires a higher level of training than for other staff in education settings, as well as more specialist training, for example, in different types of abuse (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022). Unlike in England, Welsh guidance places the responsibility on the local authority to ensure that staff in education settings receive induction training and suitable refresher safeguarding training (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022).

There is currently no requirement for a specific qualification relating to safeguarding. Training provided to the DSL and any DDSL is also expected to support them in

supporting and advising staff in carrying out their safeguarding duties. All staff should receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training, which is regularly updated – at least annually. However, there is no specific guidance in either England or Wales on who should provide this training or its exact format and content beyond the requirements set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* and *Keeping Learners Safe.*

Most DSLs we interviewed reported little or no training specifically on SV as a topic in itself, with some suggesting that training lacked a holistic approach and treated elements of SV as separate and sometimes competing priorities, for example, CSE, county lines and/or knife crime. They were keen for the links between these issues to be made more explicit. One or two expressed specific concerns about training, particularly from external independent providers, that had appeared to sensationalise violence or queried the focus on issues that lacked relevance to their specific local context.

This variability or inadequacy meant that many schools and colleges sourced their own training from a wide variety of providers. Trust leads frequently described developing their own in-house training programmes tailored to school contexts and needs.

Findings from the Teacher Tapp survey support what we found in the qualitative research, with only 14% of teachers saying they had received specific training on SV within the past two years. Of those who had received training, only 11% said that it was helpful [Figure 4]. DSLs were slightly more likely to have received specific training, at 20% and DDSLs at 18%. SV, for this question, used the YEF definition: "The use of threat of intentional physical force. It can include murder, physical assault, harm (or the threat of harm) with a weapon, and robbery".

Figure 4 – Responses of 7,331 teachers on 3 December 2024 to the Teacher Tapp survey.

There was very little difference between state-funded primary and secondary school teachers, with a slightly higher percentage of primary teachers saying they had received

helpful training (12% compared to 10%). School teachers in the Midlands and Yorkshire and the North East were also slightly more likely to have received helpful training (14% for both), with only 10-11% in other regions.

More interesting was that those in more affluent schools (in the top quartile for free school meal eligibility) were more likely to say they had received helpful training (18%) than those in the middle (9% for both Q2 and Q3) and those in the most disadvantaged (12%), where we might expect to see higher levels of SV. This raises an interesting question about both the content and quality of training received and how it is perceived by those in schools and colleges in relation to the issues they are facing around SV.

Around 200 teachers who said they had received SV training responded to an open question about who provided the training and how effective they felt it was. While some described the training they received as "very effective" or "excellent", others found it lacking in practical application or relevance to their specific context. The most positive experiences related to the benefits of learning from real-life scenarios and case studies to help them understand the issue discussed. Many were also positive about coverage of specific topics such as knife crime, gangs and violence against women and girls. However, one said it consisted of "a presentation lasting ten minutes".

"Basic training and information from DSL. Useful information, but I wouldn't feel confident if I came across such a situation in school".
- Secondary school respondent, Teacher Tapp survey

The most common negative was a concern about the lack of practical advice and strategies for dealing with violence in the classroom. Some teachers found training too generic and lacking in relevance to their specific school context or student cohort. In-house training, particularly when delivered by Senior Leadership Teams or Safeguarding Leads, was sometimes criticised as being ineffective or simply reiterating information available elsewhere.

A number of responses referenced in-house training, which chimes with interview responses that suggested that this was one way that schools or MATs were attempting to meet a greater need for training that wasn't available or wasn't felt to be sufficient. The range of providers mentioned, including a number of private providers alongside local authorities, also reflected the qualitative interview findings. These highlight the lack of standardisation or quality assurance of training provision in safeguarding, as well as the huge variation in perceived quality.

Designated Safeguarding Leads most commonly mentioned seeking or receiving support through informal networks and personal relationships.

A few DSLs referenced the availability of support via the local authority to discuss cases and gain advice for referrals, but in some areas, DSLs talked of "chasing someone down" to get advice or information. There was a heavy reliance on personal relationships between individuals across agencies to share information and advice,

sometimes including school liaison officers or similar. This particularly seemed to be the case where there was alleged criminal activity and a reluctance to share information due to ongoing investigations.

More than one Safeguarding Lead mentioned a private WhatsApp group linking local Safeguarding Leads together in order to offer informal support and advice and share resources.

In at least two areas, mention was made of commercial organisations offering paid-for services that included advice lines. There was some indication that this reflected a shrinking of education departments and roles within local authorities alongside the growth of MATs.

Definitions and early indicators of serious violence are not consistent and are seen by some practitioners as a barrier to accessing suitable support at the right time, particularly early intervention, for children at risk.

A number of interviewees queried what was meant by SV and the RES highlighted the lack of a single agreed definition, both in education and across youth justice teams. Practitioners spoke of the difficulty of categorising concerns, which often crossed over those identified in separate guidance, such as CCE and substance abuse. DSLs in education reported finding it difficult in some cases to make a distinction between children and young people who cause harm to others and those who are victims themselves and, therefore, offer access to the appropriate services for support. This was particularly the case when seeking early intervention prior to any specific incident or when referrals failed to meet the threshold criteria for children's social care.

"People who've been traumatized, people who are perhaps being exploited … they all present very differently. You might have people who are more aggressive; you might have people who are more withdrawn, especially within domestic abuse contexts; a child sometimes plays the role of the perfect child, and they get missed".

FE Safeguarding Lead, South East

A significant number spoke about the importance of recognising the vulnerability of children and how this puts them at risk of being exploited or drawn into violent behaviours.

"In terms of serious violence, it is the vulnerability of our young people. It's keeping them away from things like county lines because they are absolutely vulnerable to that kind of exploitation".

- DSL, East Midlands

In one area, there was recognition of the real issue of SV, but DSLs coming together found it difficult to reach a shared definition of SV and agreement on how to design a system to respond to that specific safeguarding issue consistently. In another area,

members of the LSP based in schools were working on a knife crime protocol for schools, only to have one created by the VRU adopted for use by the local authority. They were disappointed by this, as they saw the strength of the partnership lying in bringing different perspectives and practical experiences to the table and challenging each other, and there was a perception that this was lacking in the VRU approach. In particular, they felt that their initial draft was more nuanced about the conversations that should take place in school and with the family first to understand the context of any incident involving carrying a bladed article.

There was some sense of trends dictating the prevailing focus in some local authority areas and a tendency to react to serious incidents. For example, one Safeguarding Partnership Manager in the North East felt there was less recognition of organised gangs or knife crime prior to stories appearing on the news, following which it became more of a focus locally. A PRU Safeguarding Lead in London talked of being asked to support pupils in mainstream schools in response to "a particular trend", such as county lines or substance abuse. This sometimes seemed to overshadow and supersede more preventative interventions. Nevertheless, it was clear that high-profile incidents "certainly sharpened minds" and raised the issue of SV higher in the agenda across agencies and partnerships.

Information sharing remains uneven, both within safeguarding partnerships and across areas, and this acts as a barrier to both effectiveness and early intervention.

Information sharing across schools and agencies (particularly health services, social care and the police) is crucial for effective safeguarding, particularly in terms of early identification and intervention. In some areas, this responsibility seemed to sit with DSLs in schools who were liaising regularly with contacts in the police or VRU or via regular partnership meetings. However, in many cases, a wide range of interviewees reported struggles with both the availability and timeliness of information sharing from different agencies. One interviewee in a youth justice team in London recalled a case where they didn't find out until much later that a, by then, young man was heavily involved in county lines activities as a child.

Many spoke positively about the impact of Operation Encompass[5] and encouraged further initiatives of this kind, for example, sharing information with schools when families have other interactions with the police or are arrested. An interviewee in the West Midlands spoke of referring into Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings or youth offending teams but not getting any feedback to help them protect the young person or work with them. They described communication between all the services as "terrible".

[5] Operation Encompass aims to ensure that schools have timely information about all police-attended incidents of domestic abuse https://www.operationencompass.org/ [accessed 29/11/2024]

Some of the challenges to information sharing were related to incompatible systems, and others had to do with perceived reluctance or legal barriers – for example, fears of breaching GDPR regulations. Working Together (HM Government, 2023) seeks to reassert that safeguarding takes precedence over data protection rules in cases where a child is at risk.

Many areas seemed to lack adequate services around early intervention, often as a result of insufficient or short-term funding.

In many areas, interviewees reported a lack of adequate services to address concerns around children identified as at risk of becoming involved in violence, particularly where thresholds for referrals to children's social care were not met. In more than one example, DSLs said that the risk was passed back to them as a behavioural concern for the school to manage rather than being seen as an indicator of a safeguarding concern. In a number of areas, early help services had been reorganised into, or out of, family hubs or similar, with respondents unable to say whether this change had been effective, though some noted that changes were recent. Financial constraints were seen as constraining capacity in many areas, with one interviewee in a VRU in the North West reflecting that resources "have to go on the crises rather than working upstream". Some specific interventions and projects were mentioned positively by interviewees, often third sector and community-based offers, but these weren't always very accessible. The same VRU interviewee felt that some parents were overwhelmed by options, such as multiple different mentoring services.

One school safeguarding lead in the North West spoke of a "grey area" for children and young people identified as at risk of becoming involved in violence but prior to any specific incident of SV:

"We don't necessarily know where we can go for support for them if it's not at the point where youth justice [is] going to work with them".
School Safeguarding Lead, North West

One complaint from both education settings and safeguarding partnerships was that as funding for interventions or programmes was often of short duration, they changed frequently. This meant keeping information up to date was difficult and time-consuming, and some services were unwilling to work with the VRU due to the repeated need to bid for further support. This also posed a challenge in terms of ensuring longer-term support for children and their families, despite this being an important element of early intervention and prevention.

"It can't be a time-limited piece of work. It's about building that relationship with them and the continuity of having that safe work. It's not 12 weeks; it needs to be longer".
Child Services Manager, Wales

Designated Safeguarding Leads have a perception that it is harder to meet thresholds for referrals.

A DSL in the East of England struggled with "a lot of referrals being shut down straight away", and there is a widely held perception among education Safeguarding Leads that thresholds for accessing children's social care have been raised, or at least that they are not always implemented consistently. One DSL in North West England talked of "hoops that you've got to jump through to reach that threshold", and another DSL, also in the North West, felt that "how they apply thresholds is quite different". Several participants expressed concern about referrals being rejected, citing an apparent lack of shared recognition of the serious concern that led to the referral. This was particularly apparent when the referral was seeking preventative support prior to a serious incident being recorded and where the child was not yet known to children's services. As a result, DSLs felt that a lot of responsibility is pushed back onto schools, particularly in terms of early intervention and support, but that they lack adequate resources and capacity to provide it.

A number of interviewees referenced the challenge of disentangling behaviour concerns from SV safeguarding concerns. One DSL spoke of the "real blur" of knowing when a behaviour or attendance issue should be seen as a safeguarding issue or when an incident is a one-off or isolated fight in the playground or needs to be seen in the context of other vulnerabilities. One local partnership was addressing this issue by setting up a network of Behaviour Leads in schools to share information and look at case studies, for example, of children vulnerable to permanent exclusion.

There can be a lack of continuity of support for children when they transition from child to adult services.

Specific challenges were noted when working with children and young people who are approaching or turning 18 in education. This was particularly apparent when speaking with those working in FE colleges. The transition from child to adult services and the separation of child and adult safeguarding teams often caused a discontinuity in support available and a fear of children getting 'lost'. A DSL in the East Midlands spoke of a "drop off in the services that are available".

An advisory group member reported that while many DSLs were very aware of the legal duties and processes for children's safeguarding, they were far less confident about adult safeguarding.

There is currently no reference to transitional safeguarding in Keeping Children Safe In Education despite DSLs having ongoing responsibility for young people in their settings who are over the age of 18. While good examples of transitional services to help young people be safe do exist, they are very dependent on area and need to be more widely available.

The necessity of gaining consent from children and families is seen as a barrier to early intervention and support.

A specific barrier raised by almost all interview participants was that early intervention was dependent on consent from families and children. While there was no suggestion that intervention should be forced without consent, it was recognised that engaging in preventative measures, therefore, remains dependent upon a willingness to engage from families who are often wary or suspicious of involvement with police or social care in general. Some education professionals spoke of trusted relationships with parents who viewed schools as a safe space; others recognised a significant challenge in engaging with families. In FE, one interviewee acknowledged that they often had limited interaction with parents. Several interviewees spoke of the importance of holding parents more accountable for their children's well-being.

"No one wants to actually be held accountable for [a serious incident] … If we're talking about accountability, then we need to shift the culture back to parents".

- DSL, North West

One DSL in a PRU reflected that they saw more children outside of parental control than previously, leading to a greater propensity for them to make poor choices. In the most concerning cases where children become known for violence, professionals often noted that the parents were also engaged in violent behaviours and were, therefore, often resistant to involvement from education or any other agencies. Practitioners were most concerned about what they described as "disguised compliance" from families to avoid the involvement of agencies where there was insufficient evidence to escalate concerns to a Section 47 enquiry.

A number of interviewees spoke of the importance of providing support, even training, for parents much earlier, at least from when their children are primary school age. One interviewee spoke of the need for respite in many families, particularly those whose children have additional needs, as well as the need to address practical or logistical barriers, for example, transport for a child to visit a mentor or reluctance to have visitors in their house. In Wales, where there is a greater focus on well-being in the legislation and in guidance (Safeguarding Wales, n.d.; Social Services and Well-being [Wales] Act, 2014), there is a strong ethos to work alongside families, but there exists the same recognition that this is often difficult, and additional work may be required to overcome these barriers.

Responses to serious violence involving children and young people remain predominantly reactive rather than preventative.

There was a strong sense from practitioners that approaches to SV remain reactive and often linked to areas of recognised risk and high violence, making early intervention and preventative work harder. Many school leaders spoke of high levels of intervention and

support being available only after a significant incident had occurred but facing a lack of response when they highlighted fears of future incidents. One primary DSL in South East England felt that they were treating symptoms rather than curing the root problems. In contrast, a number of interviewees in local authorities or children's safeguarding partnerships did report significant investment in early intervention approaches and were working towards breaking down barriers to provide support to families. However, funding challenges mean that work tends to be targeted rather than universal.

Some of the early prevention work in schools relies on visits from the police or third sector organisations, often delivering assemblies or workshops. While these seemed a popular approach, some practitioners did raise concerns about their effectiveness and the evidence base does not support short term interventions like knife crime awareness assemblies (YEF Toolkit, n.d.). One Senior Leader in North West England feared that any positive impact would be short-lived. This view was echoed by our young advisor, who felt that assemblies were a wholly inadequate approach to supporting children and young people.

Question 4: Inequities. Is there evidence of racial disparities in current safeguarding practices? Is there evidence of any other inequities? If so, how might these inequities be eradicated?

Rapid evidence synthesis findings

The RES found very limited evidence of racial disparities within the current safeguarding system in research that specifically referenced education. The strongest finding related to inequalities within other demographic groups, in particular, girls and children at risk of EFH. However, taking a wider approach to inequities across safeguarding processes, decision-making and outcomes, several key themes did arise, including SEND and socio-economic factors, which are detailed within this section.

There is limited evidence of racial disparities in the current safeguarding system in relation to education.

Evidence specifically focusing on ethnicity and safeguarding is not clear within the RES; however, there are challenges around disparities within the treatment and outcomes of children from various ethnic backgrounds that should be considered in order to help eradicate this. Children from certain ethnic groups – especially Black children – are disproportionately likely to be victims of violence. Relative to their share of the population, Black children and young people are six times as likely to be victims of homicide. Children from certain ethnic groups are also disproportionately likely to be represented in the criminal justice system and to become involved in violence, including as victims. For example, while Black children aged 10–17 make up 6% of the population, in 2023/24, they represented 10% of arrests, 15% of stop and searches and 24% of the monthly youth custody population. They are also five times more likely to be sentenced to custody for homicide, and are more likely to self-report being involved in assault both as victims and perpetrators. This does not mean that violence is only relevant to (or mostly caused by) people from minority ethnic backgrounds. White children make up 71% of 10–17-year-olds who are stopped and searched, 76% of those arrested and 72% of those cautioned or convicted for an offence. There are also other significantly over-represented groups, such as children growing up in poverty and children in care, which intersect with racial disproportionality (YEF, 2025).

Beyond the national evidence, specific localities have identified challenges with such dispaortionality. For instance, within the Merton JTAI, it was acknowledged that children with neurodivergent and social communication needs, as well as Black children, are overrepresented among those affected by SV in the local area. The Merton Safeguarding Children's Partnership has subsequently made eradicating the adultification of black

children a key priority (Griffin, 2023; HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024; McSherry et al., 2024).

Exclusion from school also disproportionately affects certain children. In both England and Wales, Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish traveller heritage, White and Black Caribbean children, and Black Caribbean children are most likely to be excluded or suspended. In England, a greater proportion of Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish traveller heritage, White and Black Caribbean children, Pakistani children, Irish children and Black Caribbean children are also persistently absent (not in school for more than 10% of the time) when compared with White British children (YEF, 2024).

The literature in the RES resoundingly describes the issue of exclusion as problematic for children who are minoritised, neurodivergent or with SEND, or from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds (Brown et al., 2024; Griffin, 2023; YEF,2022; Islington Council, 2020, Timpson, 2019; YEF,2022). There are clear links between exclusion and the escalation of risk of SV, leading to an increased likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system, where Black children are over represented (Brown et al., 2024; Griffin, 2023). The APPG on Knife Crime report stresses the link between the increase in exclusions and the increase in knife crime, stating a case for support to be put in place before and after exclusion to ensure that children do not "slip through the net" as a result (Jones, 2019; Parish et al., 2020:2; Jones, 2019).

The evidence suggests many girls feel unsafe within the school environment as a result of the school culture and the prevalence of harmful sexual behaviours not being adequately addressed.

Several of the RES studies highlighted the persistent feelings of unsafety experienced by girls in schools. From name-calling to victim-blaming, girls believe that school environments are not structured to support them (Firmin, 2020). They reported that disclosing incidents of relationship abuse or sexting to teachers often resulted in them being ostracised and receiving no support (Firmin, 2020). This was reiterated in Ofsted's (2021) report, where girls were noted as being reluctant to discuss abuse due to fears of being ostracised, getting into trouble or being blamed for what happened to them (Ofsted, 2021). The prevalence of HSBs increases where issues around negative gender constructions and norms are not addressed and are embedded into the school culture (Walker, 2022).

It must be noted the importance of including boys in any inputs and discussions around harmful sexual violence and girls, including on topics around crime involvement. One study within the RES reported that boys tend not to be as informed as girls about sexual violence, and there should be more of a focus on educating them within RSE (Horeck et al., 2023). Where education around HSB and SV was not provided across the whole school, there was an increased risk of professionals struggling to associate certain

cohorts with specific risks and behaviours, as noted by Langhoff et al. (2024). Here, professionals struggled to associate girls with criminal activities and, therefore, were unable to spot the signs and intervene in a timely way (Langhoff et al., 2024).

Gender inequities that could impact safeguarding disclosures and decision-making were found to be further impacted within religious schools, as reported by Kasstan (2022). The study focused on the self-reporting of abuse in religious schools through the analysis of digital narratives of abuse and 53 qualitative interviews with children, parents and practitioners. The study found that child-on-child sexual assault often occurred at school, and when it happened outside of school, intimidation and other forms of sexual violence would continue within the school. The study concluded that education around consent and relationships within faith-based schools is inadequate, with girls feeling powerless and "preyed upon" (Kasstan, 2022:7). This supports wider research on negative gender constructs and the lack of a whole-school approach to safeguarding and HSBs (Kasstan, 2022). There is very limited research available on sexual violence within faith-based schools, and further research is needed (Kasstan, 2022). If girls do not feel that they can report safeguarding concerns to their school, this could mean that they are further at risk of experiencing sexual violence.

Some of the RES studies indicated that institutional structures within schools could perpetuate and normalise harmful gender constructs by failing to provide effective resources to safeguard pupils from HSBs. Walker (2022) asserts that schools have a responsibility to create safer environments for pupils by addressing these harmful gender norms with a consistent approach that is sensitive to the cultural and contextual factors within schools (Firmin et al., 2019).

Extra-familial harm and risks outside the home pose greater safeguarding challenges in relation to the education system due to challenges for coordination and information sharing across agencies.

Other well-acknowledged inequities highlight differences in responses across the range of harms and risks that are experienced by children. More recently, there has been an increased focus on EFH, defined as child welfare risks occurring in the community or peer group (Firmin et al., 2023), and risks outside the home, which include risk of harm from SV or exploitation (Longworth et al., 2024). Various reports, however, still indicate issues in local safeguarding responses to these issues compared to intra-familial harms, defined as harms happening within the home or from family members (Firmin et al., 2023).

Firmin et al. (2023) highlight how local systems currently struggle to effectively address EFH due to inadequate multi-agency responses and a lack of understanding regarding the recording and sharing of information. There is a pressing need for national safeguarding reforms for EFH to enhance child safeguarding and well-being (Firmin et al., 2023). These reforms should focus on improving coordination among agencies,

enhancing information-sharing practices and ensuring that support extends beyond the school environment to encompass the broader contexts in which children live and interact. This is even more important when safeguarding or care decision-making requires the relocation of children away from their local area, as this has been noted to increase risks of EFH. (Wroe et al., 2023).

Qualitative findings

Local data and patterns around serious violence can often vary from national statistics, making it difficult to identify inequities in practice at the level of individual settings.

There was a general awareness of the national picture in terms of data and the disproportionate representation of certain ethnic groups in criminal justice statistics. However, the majority of school practitioners did not believe that specific groups were disproportionately represented in their schools in terms of safeguarding concerns around violence. In one case, a participant stated that they actually found that national data risked misleading them in terms of focus, as it was at odds with local patterns. While in areas of high levels of SV involving children and young people, DSLs often did identify specific groups of children that they recognised as being more frequently at risk, these were generally seen as representative of the local demographics of the school.

In a number of areas, DSLs talked about how demographic change and greater mobility had changed the picture locally, with particular reference to fair access[6] pupils, including those identified as English as an additional language and/or newly arrived from abroad. Overall, the picture from education settings was that their focus was on individuals rather than groups.

"It doesn't really matter what demographics or [cohort a] child fits into. They just need to deal with the issues and support the child and the family regardless".

- DSL, North West England

Where Local Authority Managers or strategic child safeguarding partners were identifying the overrepresentation of groups in the data, they were often only beginning to look at the reasons why. A number of interviewees from safeguarding partnerships mentioned further analysis or research that was planned or being carried out to explore the reasons for disproportionality, for example, reflecting on issues relating to stop and search or growing concerns around girls at risk of violence. A distinction was made between high-profile incidents of SV, such as knife crime that is reported on by the

[6] Fair access refers to the protocol which ensures that vulnerable children, and those having difficulty securing a school place in-year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible. This includes children subject to a Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan, children from the criminal justice system and others eligible based on a range of other criteria. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6124ab6ae90e0705410757e8/FAP_Guidance.pdf [accessed 29/11/2024]

press, and less visible issues often related to violence, such as criminal or sexual exploitation of children. A couple of practitioners raised concerns about the adultification of children, which is seen as prevalent in relation to some ethnic backgrounds.

DSLs in schools and colleges often referenced the challenge of distinguishing between behaviour and safeguarding concerns, particularly in relation to children at risk of exclusion. It was also clear that there was a need for greater consideration across the sector of how to identify or distinguish the over- or under-identification of groups of children in terms of behaviour and exclusions as opposed to safeguarding concerns.

Children identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were most commonly mentioned as being disproportionately represented in safeguarding concerns.

Children and young people with SEND are disproportionately represented in criminal justice statistics, with eight in 10 young people in the justice system being identified as having SEND (Child of the North, 2024). According to data provided by the Youth Custody Service, typically, over half of children in custody have SEND (Ofsted & His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2024). Both diagnosed and undiagnosed needs were a huge concern for both FE staff and those working in youth justice, with huge concerns over delays in assessment and a lack of available support for older children. In Wales, there was a multi-disciplinary team for early intervention to ensure access to speech and language assessments and the identification of need.

Several practitioners working across multiple authorities complained of the inequality in access to provision based on resources available or, in some cases, even the timing of the referral. This led to a feeling that some families got access to support while others didn't, creating greater inequality. One DSL highlighted their experience of recruitment challenges and high turnover in social work, meaning that while two families might be in a similar situation, one got a full-time social worker and the other only a temporary one, or even none.

Absence from school, particularly due to elective home education or exclusion, is considered a significant risk factor for involvement in serious violence and other safeguarding concerns.

Absence from school was universally seen as a safeguarding concern by interviewees and included those children and young people persistently or severely absent, as well as those NEET, on reduced timetables or as a result of elective home education (EHE). Every interviewee spoke of the importance of children being in school as a protective factor from a safeguarding perspective. One senior leader at a PRU talked of

"entrenched attendance issues", recognising the challenge of addressing safeguarding concerns around SV with children and young people who were "out of sight".

The recent DfE focus on attendance, including statutory guidance updated in August 2024 (DfE, 2024d), makes it clear that it is everybody's responsibility. However, while some areas have adopted a multi-agency approach to tackling the issue, in others, it remains primarily an issue for schools and colleges to tackle, with several interviewees referencing a lack of resources and capacity to adequately tackle the issue. Two interviewees referenced looking specifically at the links between attendance and SV. One in the North West spoke of a specific intervention that used attendance and other data to identify a very small group for what they saw as very effective targeted intervention work. In Wales, one project used data to first identify children with below 50% attendance and then consider other information to explore which of those identified might be at risk of criminal exploitation or on the cusp via peer group involvement in order to identify an appropriate group to target for preventative work.

EHE came up frequently as a concern, with tension between understanding the rights of parents to deregister children from school and safeguarding concerns in a context where there are no clear processes and children can become far less visible. A safeguarding lead in the North West raised particular concerns over the growing number of children being deregistered from school by parents as a last resort, sometimes to avoid threats of fines or prosecution for poor attendance.

Exclusions are another area both of debate and concern. A number of school leaders recognised the negative impact on children of being excluded but also found it difficult not to see the need for exclusion in the case of significant violent incidents. One DSL in FE in the North West felt that excluding a student who had SV in the past was only going to put that child in a worse situation. One DSL in the West Midlands felt that schools were sometimes limited in the support they could offer for children who were embedded in a lifestyle that puts them at risk. One DSL in the North West spoke of trying to reduce suspensions or using an internal suspension room within the school so that they could work with children on the behaviours that had led to the suspension, for example, fighting. One PRU spoke of working with local schools around issues to help reduce exclusions.

Question 5: Policy and practice changes. What policy and practice changes could improve the role schools, colleges and alternative provision play in safeguarding children from serious violence?

Rapid evidence synthesis findings

Current policy and proposed legislation emphasise the need to strengthen the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, but specific practice changes to achieve this remain unclear.

Our RES highlighted an important trend in policy and legislation towards action on the discussed challenges within the safeguarding system. Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2023) emphasises the need for strengthening multi-agency working when it mandates that safeguarding partnerships must explicitly report (as part of their annual reports) on how education contributes to safeguarding at the strategic and operational levels. Recent legislation at the time of writing this report, such as the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, also aims to strengthen the role of education in LSPs. Nevertheless, despite this current policy landscape, our RES highlights that there is more to be done in relation to specific systemic challenges. Addressing the role of education in safeguarding children from SV requires consideration of these wider issues. Below, we discuss what further action is recommended by the literature in relation to these challenges.

Enhancing the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to better protect children involves building on existing legislation and changing the current system to ensure education is adequately represented both operationally and strategically (The Children's Commission, 2025; DfE, 2024a; DfE, 2024b). However, it is acknowledged that while sufficient policy exists that mandates the reporting of education's role within LSPs (as part of annual safeguarding reports), there is a lack of accessible good practice for how this role should be enacted most effectively (HM Government, 2023; Lloyd & Walker, 2023). To be able to overcome the challenges of implementing policy into practice, good practice relating to education's representation and inputs at the strategic and operational levels should be shared as part of the DfE's review of compliance with Working Together (HM Government, 2023) across LSPs.

Specifically within the RES, one method that was reported to have improved educational outcomes for vulnerable children is the introduction of the role of the Virtual School Head (DfE, 2024b). There is a requirement for all local authorities to have a Virtual School Head to improve education outcomes for looked after children. This role bridges a gap between social care and education and has successfully improved educational outcomes for looked after children but not for other children with vulnerabilities. The DfE (2024b) policy statement calls for the Virtual School Head to have a statutory

requirement to support children who are not in looked after care but have a social worker due to other identified vulnerabilities. This statutory requirement is likely to benefit children at risk of SV by providing a more coordinated approach to their education and welfare.

Evidence indicates the need for improved training and support for DSLs in education to enhance the overall effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding.

The RES also highlighted the need for a nationally recognised qualification for DSLs within schools and other educational provisions in the UK. The RES findings suggest that although some DSLs feel confident and well supported by the local safeguarding arrangement, others are lacking in confidence (Bragg et al., 2022). The evidence repeatedly states that training would help to increase the confidence of staff dealing with incidents of SV (Ofsted, 2021; 2024; Young et al., 2019). Standardised training could help to create a uniform approach to safeguarding across all educational settings and create a peer network. A recognised qualification could also help to facilitate better communication and collaboration between DSLs and other safeguarding partners (El-Asam et al., 2021; Lloyd & Walker, 2023). The RES found evidence that the culture of a school is important to tackling violence and enabling children to feel safe to disclose and confident that the allegation will be dealt with appropriately.

Improved relationship and sex education in schools should be delivered by specialist teachers and should include a greater focus on identifying and addressing harmful sexual behaviours and violence.

As noted within previous questions, the RES highlighted the importance of relationship and sex education in raising awareness across the whole school around the risks and modern realities of sexual violence and what to do should there be any concerns. The RES noted the importance of RSE being taught by specialist teachers with a high level of knowledge in this area to improve the quality and depth of the education provided (Maguire & Pentaraki, 2023; Stephens & Sayer, 2021).

Regular training should be implemented for all teachers to keep them updated with current information and practices. This will enable a consistent approach to addressing HSBs and supporting children who confide in them. Additionally, embedding RSE into the school culture will ensure that it is a fundamental part of the educational experience. This will help normalise discussions around relationships and sex, reducing stigma and increasing awareness. Creating a supportive environment that values the safety and well-being of all students, particularly girls, would foster a sense of belonging and reduce the risk of involvement in violence (Meiksin et al., 2020; Parish et al., 2020; Ponsford et al., 2022; Smith, 2019).

The RES findings suggest that national policies and school practices should focus on addressing systemic cultural issues. This includes tackling denigrating language and harmful norms around girls and female sexual behaviours (Firmin, 2020). The language used in policies should be child-centred and trauma-informed, making it more accessible and relevant to the students it aims to protect (Appiah et al., 2021).

Qualitative Findings

Designated Safeguarding Leads want greater alignment and the simplification of referral processes across local authorities.

One of the most frequent requests for change was around the alignment of referral processes across local authorities. There was a huge sense of frustration among Safeguarding Leads working in schools and colleges with pupils that might live in as many as five different local authorities about having to learn and understand different terminology and processes for each one.

"There are so many different names for our front-door service to social care; it's quite phenomenal".

Trust Safeguarding Lead, National

The impact of these differences was described by one Trust Safeguarding Lead as "quite dire" in some areas. Where safeguarding processes and responses remain unclear at a systemic level, responses to SV will also remain unclear and under-developed.

"Every agency looks different in each local authority, and really, it's only schools [that] have to talk to each other. When you get a new-to-area admission, no other [agencies have] to speak to each other. So, cross-border working 100%".

Trust Safeguarding Lead, West Midlands

Better and more timely information sharing between safeguarding partners and education are needed.

While the challenges of safe data sharing were fully acknowledged, numerous participants felt frustrated by the difficulties of getting information in a timely manner from other agencies. Many felt that this could be achieved far more effectively than currently. This extended to communication about the progress of a referral and the provision of a greater level of contextual information, for example, when a parent had been incarcerated or a child was under police investigation.

"It would be really beneficial to have some kind of aligned process about what information you can and can't access because some local authorities will share with you quite openly … and [with] some local authorities, you have to wade through treacle".

Trust Safeguarding Lead, West Midlands

Education needs to be more involved in strategic partnership working.

A number of interviewees reflected on how changes to policies, particularly Working Together (HM Government, 2023), were influencing practice across safeguarding partnerships. One expert reflected that the roll-out of updates hadn't "necessarily gone as well as planned", and, certainly, the changes have been interpreted very differently across the country, leading to very different experiences for professionals working in education settings. These changes particularly included updates to multi-agency working expectations for all practitioners and the role of education, as well as recommendations for early help (NSPCC, 2023). In the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill that was presented to Parliament in December 2024 (DfE, 2024e), the government announced its intention to further strengthen the role of education in safeguarding.

Several DSLs argued for a more strategic role for education in safeguarding partnerships; behind this was a strong desire for greater recognition of the expertise within education and the contribution it has to make to multi-agency safeguarding partnerships. There were also local authority officers who referenced the impact of JTAIs in driving change, either as a result of feedback or as generating areas of specific focus. A recent report on multi-agency responses to SV (JTAI findings, 2024) highlighted many of the same concerns identified in this report around a lack of guidance relating to SV as a safeguarding issue and the need to prioritise those children and young people at disproportionate risk of harm, including those with SEND.

"Education is a massive part of that working together, and I don't think that [it] has been given the right representation in that system".
DSL, East Midlands

Intervention needs to happen earlier to prevent children from becoming involved in violence.

There was universal agreement that more needed to be done earlier with education around the impact of SV and any available support, beginning in primary schools. Several interviewees called for expert practitioners who could work more proactively with children displaying violent behaviours, particularly at a young age, prior to any involvement with police or the justice system to help them avoid that pathway. Some interviewees felt that while schools were endeavouring to put support in place, other services could be slow to act.

Making both children and parents more aware of the risks and providing practical support to help prevent children from becoming vulnerable to exploitation were seen as crucial, particularly at transition points between primary and secondary school and into post-16 education.

Short-term funding limits the effectiveness of interventions by creating uncertainty around continuity.

The short-term or temporary funding around early interventions was noted as problematic, leading to potential weaknesses in the evidence base around what works but also creating uncertainty for practitioners. Several school or trust leaders talked about how greater responsibility for earlier intervention was falling on schools and the challenge of funding this work. One referenced schools recruiting counsellors out of their own budgets, and another spoke of internal AP rather than relying on external AP of sometimes variable quality and cost.

"There needs to be longer term work. It can't be a time-limited piece of work. Sometimes, it's about building that relationship with them and the continuity of having that safe work for … It's not 12 weeks; it needs to be longer; sometimes it needs to be from doing it when you meet them up until they [are] no longer, sort of, open to [seeing] us anymore".

- Safeguarding Lead, Wales

Listening to the voices of children and young people and their communities is essential to effective safeguarding practices.

While many professionals working across education settings clearly had deep knowledge of their students and the wider community, they also acknowledged that often the children themselves are the ones who have the real insight, from understanding current slang and patterns of behaviour to recognising what input is required. A DSL in a PRU in London felt that it was essential that adults working with children took a real interest in them because some children were not used to having someone listening to them.

"They're not used to someone sitting down, listening to them to advocate for them, saying, 'This is where you've gone wrong; this is what you need to do', and also just taking a general interest".

PRU Safeguarding Lead, London

Several interviewees referenced the importance of building trusted relationships with children and young people and their families and the need for longer-term work. One DSL in a PRU spoke of the importance of having outreach workers who could provide daily mentoring support to the children but also argued that this doesn't go far enough. A number of interviewees who raised concerns around the need to get consent for early intervention work also emphasised the importance of getting into communities and really understanding not only what life is like and what matters to them but also recognising that communities often have ideas about how they can work more effectively with children.

Creating a culture of safeguarding in education, rather than emphasising individual responsibility, is essential to ensuring effectiveness.

A number of expert interviewees, as well as practitioners, brought their thinking together on the concept of needing to create a culture of safeguarding. This was seen as going beyond the basic principle of it being everybody's responsibility and instead viewing it as a culture shift in schools. This requires giving everybody the confidence to be able to fulfil their role, both within education settings and across partnerships through support and training, as well as good practice in working together and sharing information.

"Kind of difficult, isn't it, to change [the] whole culture of a school? But if that can spread … across our schools, I think that it'll be really, really beneficial".
- VRU, North West

5. Are there specific innovative models that could be adopted more widely?

One of the questions we explored was about models and examples of effective or good practice. Several projects and approaches were mentioned positively by interviewees, but we were unable to sufficiently evaluate them in terms of effectiveness to enable us to recommend any as specific examples of best practice.

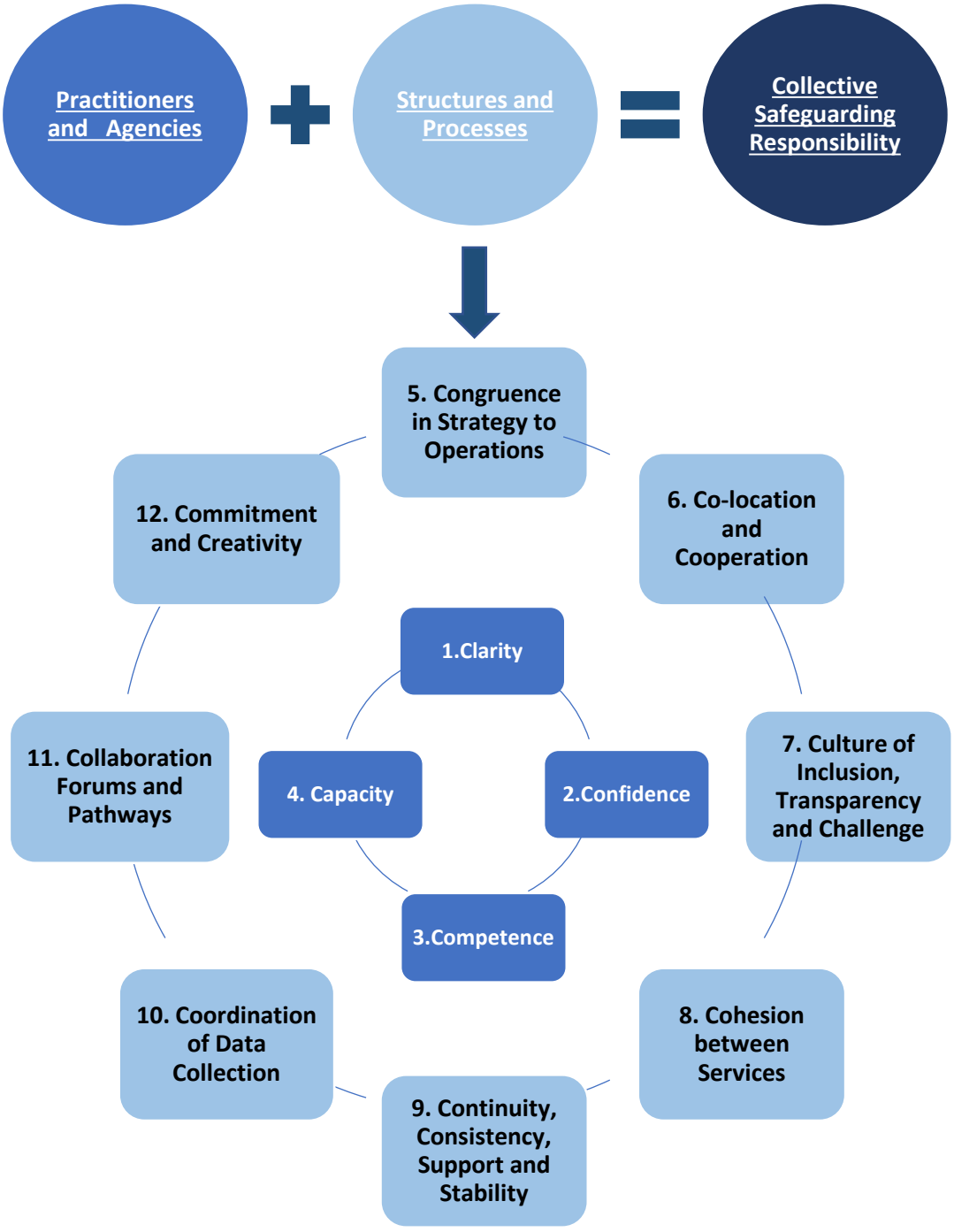
However, several projects were exploring approaches that addressed some of the challenges identified in the findings, so we share them here as examples that might be worth exploring further. It is also worth noting that at the time of writing, there are a number of reviews underway or due to be published which focus on LSPs' multi-agency working, including the DfE-commissioned work examining LSPs' annual safeguarding reports and the National Institute for Health and Care Research funded evaluation of Multi-Agency Child Safeguarding Reforms.

The Collective Safeguarding Responsibility Model: 12Cs

The Collective Safeguarding Responsibility Model: 12Cs is derived from a robust research evidence base and developed in partnership with key stakeholders (Ball, 2024). This research explored multi-agency safeguarding in relation to children, adults and families through a variety of thematic areas. The framework details 12 components which can guide the implementation and steer the accountability of multi-agency safeguarding activities across the system [Figure 5]. It distinguishes those components which relate to Practitioners and Agencies and those relevant to Structures and Processes. The framework illustrates the enactment of safeguarding being everyone's responsibility (Ball, McElwee & McManus, 2024).

To date, the 12Cs model has been promoted by National Independent Safeguarding to the Welsh Government and Regional Safeguarding Boards, and it is also part of training for Care Inspectorate Wales. The 12Cs model has been cited in the National Practice Framework for Wales: An Engagement Strategy (2024) as part of a consultation to support the Welsh Government's Transformation Programme for Children's Social Services in Wales (Bowden, 2025). It has also been included in training for HMI Probation Inspectorates and by Lancashire Police.

Figure 5 – The Collective Safeguarding Responsibility Model: 12Cs. (Ball & McManus, 2023:3)



The London Inclusion Charter

The London Inclusion Charter was launched in 2024 and is a response by the Mayor of London's VRU to rising suspensions and absenteeism from school, which have been linked to greater risks of children becoming engaged in or vulnerable to violent behaviours. It is the first city-wide approach of its type and reflects a London-wide commitment to keeping children safe and supporting them to thrive in school. It was developed under the leadership of the VRU, building on the voices of children and young people and being informed by schools, parents and carers, local authorities, and education specialists.

Signatories to the Charter commit to prioritising education that is fully inclusive, fair and available to all by promoting and investing in inclusive practices. This includes putting children's rights first and seeking to tackle the rise in suspensions and absenteeism through a set of agreed guiding principles around inclusion. It is backed by a new partnership with UNICEF and £1.4m investment to provide a universal offer of its Rights Respecting School Award programme free to all state-funded schools and education settings in the 32 local authorities in London.[7]

Local authorities, young people, schools and education settings are invited to sign up to support the four principles: embedding equity and diversity, students as active citizens, being adaptable and reflective, and beyond academic achievement (Mayor of London's VRU, 2024).

The Education Hive, Greater Manchester

In response to local research highlighting information sharing as a barrier to timely intervention, Greater Manchester VRU is establishing the Education Hive, with the aim of "working together to reduce violence, raise aspirations and instil confidence" (Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit, 2024). The Hive is an online platform to facilitate collaboration and information sharing between professionals and arrange events to share resources, research and techniques focused on improving student outcomes and well-being. The Hive will act as a forum for partners to share best practices, discuss common challenges, ask questions and identify solutions across education, healthcare, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the VRU, among others.

The Safeguarding Hub, Luton and Bedfordshire

Chiltern Teaching School (CTS) has worked with a range of partners to develop a Safeguarding Hub of centralised resources and tailored support for schools wanting to address serious youth violence in the Luton/Bedfordshire region.

A crucial feature of the Safeguarding Hub's development process was the recurring consultation of local young people at multiple touchpoints and in multiple formats –

[7] https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/londons-violence-reduction-unit-vru/londons-inclusion-charter [accessed 15/01/2025]

including student focus groups, regional surveys of students and a student board of advisors. This approach was taken to ensure the accuracy, relevance and impact of any resources developed and to provide an outlet for the empowerment of young people to effect change in their own community.

As well as reviewing available literature and existing regional interventions, the Hub's research and development phase, **Step 1,** involved consultation with school leaders, teachers and students to guide project design. **Step 2** saw the formation of the student advisory group, a board of local secondary students who were consulted as experts throughout the project and who contributed directly to the design of research tools. In **Step 3**, a survey developed with the student advisory group was conducted with students across 12 schools in the Luton/Bedfordshire region, with the results informing curriculum scope and design. In **Step 4,** student focus groups were then arranged to supplement and contextualise the results of the survey with more detailed insights from young people.

These multiple instances of consultation and collaboration with young people informed the Hub's final development steps, involving expert consultation and the write-up of curriculum materials. By triangulating youth participation methods, CTS aims to increase the likelihood that resources available in the Safeguarding Hub accurately reflect and address the realities of serious youth violence.

6. Insights for policy and practice

Drawing on the findings from the RES, the qualitative interviews and the Teacher Tapp survey, as well as reflections from the advisory panel, our insights focus on three main areas:

1. Supporting education staff to carry out their safeguarding role effectively in relation to SV
2. Strengthening the role of education in LSCPs and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
3. Empowering children, young people and communities to respond to SV.

1. Support education staff to carry out their safeguarding role effectively in relation to serious violence

Current variations in terminology and processes cause frustration and potential confusion and can act as a barrier to effective safeguarding. Police and health agencies in safeguarding partnerships often have a wider geographical remit than individual local authorities and should support greater alignment of terminology and processes. Information sharing is also problematic in many areas, with professionals overly reliant on informal networks for advice and support. Wider work at a policy level, for example, the MacAlister Review (MacAlister, 2022) and recent JTAI report findings (Ofsted, 2024), has indicated the importance of developing effective responses to safeguarding and SV, and this should be continued in consultation with education settings and multi-agency safeguarding partners. A lack of a shared definition and understanding of SV in the context of EFH leads to challenges for staff in determining appropriate action and determining whether thresholds for referrals have been met. Education staff and leaders can struggle to distinguish between behavioural and safeguarding concerns in relation to SV and need greater confidence in identifying and responding to risks.

- **The DfE should support LSPs in standardising referral processes and terminology across different local authorities in order to support the development of effective responses to safeguarding and SV, as per existing recommendations for social care responses to EFH.**
- **The DfE and Education Wales should create a shared definition of SV that takes a holistic view of the vulnerabilities of children and brings together the different indicators of harm currently identified in policy guidance (Keeping Children Safe in Education, (DfE,2023); Keeping Learners Safe, (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022)).**

There is currently no reference to transitional safeguarding in guidance for education staff, despite them having responsibility for young people turning 18 and after the age of 18. Knowledge of adult safeguarding practices is generally weaker, and there are clear gaps between child and adult services that can be challenging to navigate.

- **A stronger narrative around serious youth violence should be built into existing transitional safeguarding guidance within LSPs but also incorporated nationally into Keeping Children Safe in Education and Keeping Learners Safe to support the work of DSLs with children approaching and reaching the age of 18 while in education settings.**
- **Examples of good practices in transitional services should be shared more widely by safeguarding partnerships. This could be done at the local level through safeguarding partnership annual reports or inspections/audits.**

Current safeguarding training in SV is seen as inadequate in the context of recent changes to policy and increasing demands on schools. DSLs have seen an expansion in their responsibilities, but there remains limited guidance on what must be covered in safeguarding training and no standardisation or quality assurance in relation to providers. Education staff need greater confidence in identifying and responding to safeguarding concerns around SV, as well as how these might relate to behaviour, attendance, SEND and other vulnerabilities. As the current approach to high-quality professional development for education is through the DfE's suite of NPQs, it would be logical to use this as a mechanism for addressing issues within safeguarding training and SV while also recognising the value and status of the role of DSLs as non-statutory partners in multi-agency safeguarding.

- **The DfE should incorporate content on SV into the NPQLBC for Leading Behaviour and Culture and NPQs for Senior Leaders, Headteachers and Executive Leaders. This should draw on evidence in relation to effective interventions, such as the YEF toolkit, and the importance of inclusive cultures and support for balancing behaviour and safeguarding concerns in practice.**
- **The DfE should introduce an additional NPQ for Designated and Deputy Safeguarding Leads that recognises the importance and responsibility of the roles. This should include specialised training in responding to SV alongside other safeguarding duties and responsibilities as outlined in existing guidance, as well as how to improve training on SV and safeguarding for other education staff**
- **Providers of DSL training should include risk mitigation and management planning for children in education settings who have experienced violence and/or been involved in the criminal justice system.**
- **Schools and trusts should ensure that safeguarding training encompasses SV and explores the possible links between other EFHs, such as CCE and CSE, as outlined in policy guidance. Training should also explicitly reference the possible links between attendance, suspension and exclusion and the risk of children becoming involved in SV.**

2. Strengthen the role of education in local safeguarding children partnerships and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

The recent policy statement, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive (DfE, 2024b) and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (DfE, 2024), make specific provisions intended to strengthen safeguarding arrangements. This includes the requirements for the inclusion of education and childcare providers in local safeguarding arrangements and multi-agency child protection. It also provides for the creation of a single unique identifier for children to improve the safeguarding of children who are electively home-educated or NEET (House of Commons Library, 2025). The evidence in this report indicates that the inclusion of education representatives in multi-agency safeguarding varies across areas as well as by different types of settings, but there is currently little specific evidence or guidance as to what constitutes good or effective practice.

We welcome the intention of the DfE to strengthen the role of education in LSCPs and arrangements, as set out in the new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2024). In order to support this work, we suggest two key approaches:

- **The DfE should ensure that guidance and support documents to implement the measures within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill are co-produced with safeguarding professionals from a range of education settings. These should operationalise the mandated requirements in Working Together (HM Government, 2023) regarding education's representation and input at a strategic and operational level in safeguarding arrangements. Any documentation should specifically reference how to protect children from involvement in violence.**
- **The DfE should provide examples of good safeguarding practices and what effective education involvement in multi-agency safeguarding looks like at the strategic and operational levels. This may already be known from other DfE-commissioned work, such as the review of Annual Safeguarding Partnership Reports, but requires wider sharing within specific guidance, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2024a), Keeping Learners Safe (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022) and Working Together (HM Government, 2023) to provide more effective and consistent working.**

The establishment of VRUs provides targeted funding in areas where there are higher levels of SV; however, access to early help or intervention remains uneven for many children and young people and their families. As resources are often based on local authority of residence, this can lead to inequality, as can the capacity and funds of schools and education settings to provide greater levels of support.

- **The government should direct targeted funding for early intervention and preventative work around SV in education settings to ensure more equitable access for children and young people, given the importance of**

youth clubs/activities and specialist services in dealing with those concerns below statutory thresholds.

3. Empower children, young people and communities to respond to serious violence by listening to and amplifying their voices

Research shows that a culture of belonging is an important element in ensuring children feel safe and secure at school or college and that this can be a protective factor against involvement in SV. Suspensions and exclusions disproportionately affect specific groups, and this contributes to inequalities in outcomes both in educational attainment and wider life outcomes. A set of measures that can be used to understand the experiences of children in school would provide a starting point for addressing some of the issues that contribute to inequalities.

- **The DfE should work with schools and organisations representing groups of schools to co-create national measures of belonging and inclusion with children. These should be robust and reliable and reviewed annually to help drive school improvement and target investment. These measures should specifically include measures relating to feelings of safety.**

The expectations for multi-agency working (HM Government, 2023) include listening to the voices of children and families. Young people's concerns don't always match the priorities dictated by policy or suggested by data, so approaches may not meet needs. Also, policy and practice changes are often driven by serious but rare events rather than ongoing current concerns.

- **Education settings should consult with children on how they could feel safer both in and around school and co-produce action plans to implement suggested changes, drawing on evidence-based interventions (YEF, 2024).**
- **LSPs should set up mechanisms for regularly consulting children on their perceptions of SV and how agencies should respond to concerns raised. Importantly, they should report regularly on how they have engaged with children and young people and what the impact of this engagement has been (via annual safeguarding reports).**

Current education provision for children and young people around SV and related areas, such as CSE and CCE, is extremely uneven, with much provision being in the form of awareness assemblies, which have limited effectiveness (YEF toolkit, n.d.). Including relevant and age-appropriate elements in the guidance for relationship education would support children and young people in understanding and recognising the signs of exploitation and the impact of violence and provide them with skills to support and challenge their peers.

- **Children should be taught to understand the impact of SV and where to access further information and support through its inclusion within the curriculum for relationship education (DfE, 2021). Content should be**

drawn from the evidence of existing research on approaches to preventing serious youth violence (YEF Toolkit, n.d.) and delivered by those with specialist expertise, utilising a whole school approach that does not exclude certain genders or cohorts.

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Appendix A

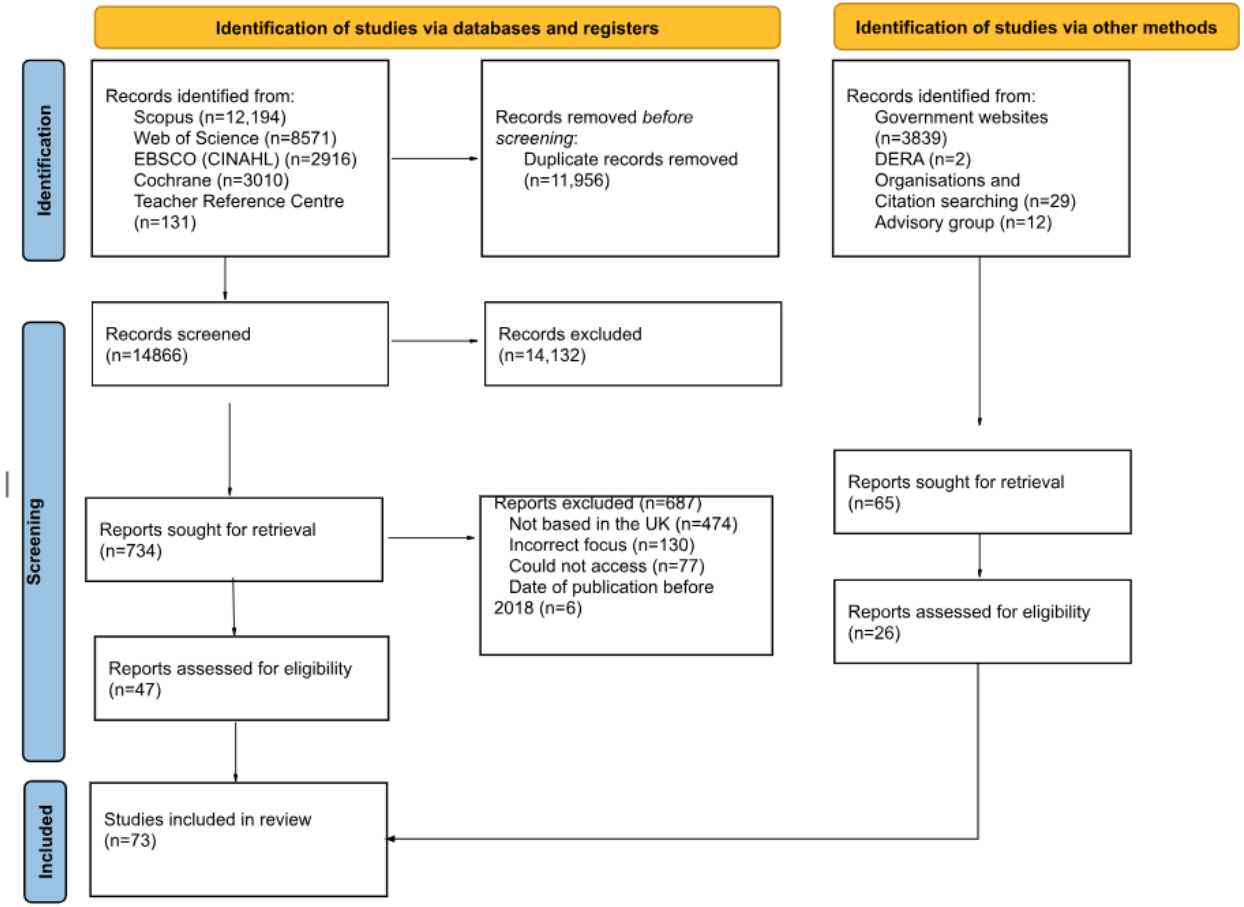
Table 1 PICT Search terms

Population: Children, Young People (up to the age of 18 years).	child*, pre-adolescen* adolescen*, teen* "young people", "young person", youth, "young adult*", "school student*", "school pupil*"
Phenomena of Interest: Violence, Safeguarding.	robbery, knife, blade, point, "offensive weapon*", gun, weapon*, "corrosive weapon*, "county lines", gang, "drug dealing", "drug seller", violen*, abus*, harm*, crime, threat*, sexual, "sexual offence*", rape, domestic, "intimate partner", emotional, "coercive control", physical, psychological, interpersonal, relationship, "child to parent abuse", "online abuse", "online harm*", "criminal damage", "violence against property", "serious violence", "serious crime", "serious violent crime*", "organised crime", "criminal exploitation", exploitation, "youth violence", "modern slavery", "community violence", assault*, "physical assault", injur*, homicide, murder, gunshot, stab*, kni*, arson, safeguard*, "child protection", signposting, referral*, "statutory guidance", polic*, procedure*, "multi-agency", "early help".
Context: School, Education, Post-16 Institutions, Alternative Provision, Teaching Professions, in the England and Wales	school, "secondary school*", "primary school*", "high school*", "middle school*", "junior school*", education, "primary education", "secondary education", "sixth form college*", "sixth form", "post-16 education", college*, "pupil referral unit*", "PRU*", "alternative provision*", "Section 19", teacher, "school staff", "college staff", "teaching assistant*", "safeguarding lead*, "school nurse*", "local authority education team", "education welfare officer", "educational psychologist", "teaching staff", "pastoral staff", Exclu*, Suspen*, ", England, Wales,

Type of study	Government reports and policy documents, current statutory guidance, legislative documents, white and green papers, existing reviews of practice, organisational reports, qualitative and quantitative research studies, systematic reviews, case studies, evaluation reports, policy analysis, reports from advocacy and NGOs, expert opinion/ commentary, grey literature

Appendix B

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases and other sources



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit: http://www.prisma-statement.org/

Appendix C

Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, Hong et al., 2018)
Full document available here.

			SCREENING QUESTIONS		1. QUALITATIVE STUDIES			
First author	Year	Citation	S1. Are there clear research questions?	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?
Bonell	2020	Bonell, C., Dodd, M., Allen, E., Bevilacqua, L., McGowan, J., Opondo, C., ... & Viner, R. M. (2020). Broader impacts of an intervention to transform school environments on student behaviour and school functioning: post hoc analyses from the INCLUSIVE cluster randomised controlled trial. *BMJ Open*, *10* (5), e031589.	Yes	Yes				
Bragg	2022	Bragg, S., Ponsford, R., Meiksin, R., Lohan, M., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Hadley, A., ... & Bonell, C. (2022). Enacting whole-school relationships and sexuality education in England: Context matters. *British Educational Research Journal*, *48* (4), 665-683.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Butler	2024	Butler, N., Quigg, Z., Wilson, C., McCoy, E., & Bates, R. (2024). The Mentors in Violence Prevention programme: impact on students' knowledge and attitudes related to violence, prejudice, and abuse, and willingness to intervene as a bystander in secondary schools in England. *BMC Public Health*, *24* (1), 729.	Yes	Yes				
Clark	2018	Clark, M., Lewis, A., Bradshaw, S., & Bradbury-Jones, C. (2018). How public health nurses' deal with sexting among young people: a qualitative inquiry using the critical incident technique. *BMC Public Health*, *18*, 1-10.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clarke	2020	Clarke, A., Olive, P., Akooji, N., & Whittaker, K. (2020). Violence exposure and young people's vulnerability, mental and physical health. *International Journal of Public Health*, *65*, 357-366.	Yes	Yes				
Duffy	2021	Duffy, M., Walsh, C., Mulholland, C., Davidson, G., Best, P., Bunting, L., ... & Devaney, J. (2021). Screening children with a history of maltreatment for PTSD in frontline social care organisations: An explorative study. *Child Abuse Review*, *30* (6), 594-611.	Yes	Yes				
		El-Asam, A., Katz, A., Street, C., Nazar, N. M., & Livanou, M. (2021). Children's services for the digital age: A						

Appendix D

Rapid Evidence Synthesis Table of Inclusion

Lead author and date of publication	Brief synopsis
Appiah, 2021	Guidance document focused on being critically reflective of the language used to talk to, and about, children at risk of exploitation and harm. How practitioners talk about and write about children can impact their sense of self. "Adultist" language used in health and social care services excludes children. It's important to use language that children are familiar with, and they should be involved in shaping the narratives and language used to describe their experiences. Strengths-based language is an opportunity to shape their identity positively. It's important that practitioners expand their perspective of vulnerability and victimhood to understand ways in which young people have made attempts to meet their own needs.
Baguley, S. 2020	Internal scoping review about transitions to FE colleges.
Bonell, 2020	The paper investigates the broader impacts of the "Learning Together" intervention, which aimed to transform school environments through restorative practices and a social-emotional skills curriculum. Conducted in 40 state secondary schools in southern England, the study found significant reductions in cyberbullying, aggressive behaviours, e-cigarette use, and truancy among students aged 11-12. These findings suggest that the intervention not only improved student behaviour and school functioning but also promoted overall adolescent health.
Bragg, 2022	This paper argues that achieving meaningful and lasting change in relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) in schools requires more than just a curriculum. The study focuses on two recent RSHE pilot studies in English secondary schools, analysing how whole-school elements were enacted in different settings and the contextual factors influencing these differences. Whole-school approaches, which engage carers, communities, and local services, address cultural norms, change policies, and involve young people, are shown to be promising. These approaches are advocated to tackle issues like sexual harassment and abuse in schools, but they have not been rigorously evaluated.
Brown, 2024	An evidence-based plan for addressing childhood vulnerability, crime and justice. This report published in late 2024 focuses on why children become involved in or are at risk of serious violence. Strong key messages around the vulnerability of children involved/ at risk of SV and explores how this could be overcome.

Butler, 2024	The study evaluates the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme, aimed at changing harmful attitudes and increasing non-violent bystander intervention among students aged 11-18. Using a mixed methods design, pre- and post-surveys, and interviews, the study found positive impacts for mentors, including improved knowledge and attitudes towards violence prevention and bystander behaviour. However, no significant changes were observed among mentees. Despite this, mentees appreciated the programme's content and peer-led delivery. The study concludes that while MVP is effective for mentors, its effectiveness as a universal programme for mentees is inconclusive. Further research is recommended to enhance the programme's design and impact.
Carneiro, 2024	This report focused on effect of Sure Start (SS) presented a significant reduction in serious youth crime but mixed results for less severe criminal justice system (CJS) engagement. Children exposed to SS received 20% fewer custodial sentences by age 16 compared to their peers. Access to SS between ages 0 and 4 reduced youth crime resulting in convictions or custodial sentences by 13%, with custodial sentences decreasing by a fifth. Reductions in youth offending were notable for theft and drug offences (both by 20%). However, there was a 10% increase in less serious misdemeanours by age 12 and rises in cautions for criminal damage and violent crime, although the number of 16-year-olds receiving cautions remained unchanged. These increases in less severe misbehaviour extended to schools, with secondary pupils more likely to miss school days and be suspended.
Children's Commissioner, 2025	Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. This briefing for MPs explores potential legislation changes to support safeguarding for children. This will give children the same protection as adults, to ensure children's homes (LAC) are legal and safe, bring in a register of children not registered in schools, and to have more oversight into children being removed from school.
Clark, 2018	This paper explores public health nurses' (PHNs) knowledge and confidence in addressing sexting. Conducted in 2016, the qualitative study conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with PHNs in England. Results showed that PHNs viewed sexting as a normalized practice in trusting relationships, informed by media reports. However, they lacked confidence in discussing sexting with young people. The study concludes that while PHNs have a role in promoting digital safety, their potential is not fully realised, and improving their understanding of technology use is essential for effective safeguarding.
Clarke, 2020	The study examines the impact of violence exposure, particularly domestic and relationship violence, on the mental and physical health of young people aged 13-14 in north-west England. It found significantly worse health outcomes for those affected by violence, including higher risks of loneliness, bullying, self-harm, and poorer health practices. The study highlights the need for policy-level strategies to design health services for young people, addressing health access knowledge deficits and recognizing the

	intersectionality of vulnerability among minority youth. It underscores the critical role of addressing violence exposure to improve young people's overall well-being.
Department for Education, 2024	Keeping children safe in education 2024. This guidance emphasises a child-cantered approach to safeguarding, ensuring children's voices are heard and respected. It outlines pathways for staff to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns, including recognising signs of abuse and neglect. The guidance mandates robust systems for managing safeguarding, involving multi-agency collaboration, clear policies, and continuous staff training. It highlights the importance of listening to children, understanding their experiences, and providing appropriate support. The document also stresses the need for effective information sharing and maintaining a safe environment through vigilant recruitment and safeguarding practices.
Department for Education (2024b), 2024	Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. This report outlines how the government will try to change systems (such as education/ social care) to support the most vulnerable children and families.
Duffy, 2021	This study explored the effectiveness of a PTSD screening tool in frontline services for young people with a history of abuse. Screening 141 young people in community care settings, the study found that 72.3% screened positively for probable PTSD, with 64.7% of these cases confirmed through further assessments. Additionally, 36.9% met the threshold for probable depression and 46.8% for anxiety. Key factors associated with positive PTSD screens included being on the child protection register, previous mental health contact, and interpersonal trauma. The study highlights the feasibility of using screening measures in social care services, emphasizing the need for appropriate training and support for staff.
El-Asam, 2020	This study explores how local services in England, including social care, health, and police, address digital risks among children and adolescents. Using interviews with 14 participants from 10 services, the study found a narrow focus on specific risks like Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), leading to limited awareness of broader online dangers. Assessment tools were often generic and focused on CSE or social media, neglecting other online risks unless safeguarding issues were raised. Multi-agency collaboration was hindered by inadequate referral mechanisms, and there was a lack of structured training on online risks. The study highlights the need for systematic integration of online risk considerations in children's services and improved training and collaboration.
Filkin, 2022	This paper explores the development of adolescent offending, focusing on causes such as truancy, peer pressure, and disengagement from education and parents. Interviews with ten recently released adult offenders revealed key themes: substance use, enjoyment of risk-taking, financial gain, desire for criminal status, and rejection of authority. Educational disengagement often led to associations with anti-social peers, fostering offending identities. Long-term consequences included

	substance use, serious criminality, and increased risk-taking. The study emphasises the importance of early interventions to address these issues and prevent the progression of criminal behaviour.
Firmin (et al), 2019	This paper explores the prevention of peer sexual abuse in schools in England, using data from practice observations, case and policy reviews, and focus groups with professionals and students. It identifies four key levers for preventing peer sexual abuse through a whole school approach and contextual safeguarding, with a focus on gender. These levers create social conditions that reduce the risk of abuse. The study highlights opportunities for schools, regulators, and child protective services to utilize these levers and discusses the methodologies used to identify them. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies and policy implications to effectively prevent peer sexual abuse in educational settings.
Firmin, 2020	This paper examines peer sexual abuse in seven UK schools using data from practice observations, case and policy reviews, and focus groups with professionals and students. The study identifies several critical issues. Interventions are often seen as a tick box exercise, with staff not adhering to the values outside of these. There is an understanding that racism is wrong, but this does not extend to sexual abuse by students. Both students and staff lack understanding around the sharing of images, leading to victim-blaming. Policies focus on incident management rather than prevention. The study emphasizes the need for significant progress in policy to challenge harmful norms and prevent peer sexual abuse.
Firmin, 2023	This paper explores the effectiveness of serious case reviews (SCRs) in understanding and addressing extra-familial harm (EFH) among adolescents. Analysing 49 SCRs from 2010-2020, the study examined contexts associated with EFH, social work responses, and case review recommendations. Findings indicate that SCRs provide limited insights into the contextual dynamics of EFH. Social work responses often fail to address these dynamics, and reviewers frequently overlook this gap when suggesting service improvements. The study suggests that for SCRs to better inform contextual child protection systems, both the information provided to review authors and the design of the reviews need to be adapted.
Fox, 2024	This paper highlights the challenges in safeguarding missing children, noting that the number of reports exceeds police capacity, and that harm is often underreported. Examining 18 months of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in England, findings reveal that children missing from home or care (MFHC) frequently experience repeat incidents, school absences, exclusions, and multiple vulnerabilities and harm types. The study suggests extending the police Philomena Protocol to schools to better protect at-risk children. It emphasises that the constraints of formal guardianship can leave vulnerable children both overexposed to harm and under-served by protective services.

Franklin, 2018	This UK study examines the identification of, and support for, young people with learning disabilities who experience or are at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Despite significant attention to CSE in the UK, young people with learning disabilities have been largely overlooked. Through in-depth interviews with 27 young people, the study highlights their unique needs and experiences. The findings emphasize the importance of listening to these young voices to inform policy and practice improvements. The study identifies gaps in current support systems and suggests that schools and educational settings play a crucial role in recognizing and addressing the risks faced by this vulnerable group
Griffin, 2023	This thematic review on serious violence in Croydon includes the voices of children. It highlights that interventions often come too late, with unclear effectiveness. Six excluded children had died due to suicide or murder. Consistent and reliable relationships with children are crucial, but unique outcomes are not recorded, leading to impersonal records. Poverty is a significant factor. It's essential to view children as needing protection rather than as adults making life choices, especially for Black British children. Relationships with key workers should be based on trust, stability, and respect. Families desire swift action from schools on issues like knife carrying. Delayed court cases reduce the fear of consequences. Families should co-produce interventions, but frontline workers are overstretched and face systemic challenges.
Henderson, 2019	In 2020, 46% of the 8,875 Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSOs) in Scotland were home CSOs, primarily due to truancy or offending. A study of 172 children revealed a significant increase in school attendance from 45% to 57% after one year, though there was no notable change in offending. The children's complex circumstances often included broader wellbeing issues. While home CSOs effectively improved school attendance, their impact on offending remains uncertain.
Higgins, 2020	The study from Belfast explores how school attachment and commitment impact adolescent offending. It assessed 4,049 young people from 42 schools using multilevel modelling. Results showed that high school commitment and fewer fights at age 13 led to lower offending at age 14. School differences accounted for 7% of offending variation. Individual-level interventions were found to be more cost-effective in reducing offending, though school-level interventions could also help, especially in deprived areas. Ensuring a safe school environment is crucial, particularly for students not facing socio-economic deprivation, as lack of safety increases offending rates.
HM Government (2023)	Working together to safeguard children. The guidance emphasizes a child-cantered approach to child protection plans, involving the family network to support the child. It details the responsibilities of various agencies in creating and implementing plans that address the child's needs and assess potential risks. The guidance promotes open communication with parents and carers, ensuring their involvement throughout the process. It underscores the importance of providing essential resources, such as food,

	clothing, and shelter, to safeguard children from harm. Additionally, the document serves as a comprehensive guide for effective multi-agency collaboration to protect children's welfare.
HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024	Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children. Looks at the 6 JTAI reports and focuses on 3 themes: strategic responses to serious youth violence; work with children, both individuals and groups, affected by serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation; intervention in specific places to improve safety for children and communities.
Holt, 2023	This paper investigates student violence towards teaching assistants in UK schools, highlighting that this issue is often overlooked despite teaching assistants being at higher risk of such violence compared to other staff. It draws parallels between this violence and gender-based violence, emphasizing the feminised and undervalued nature of teaching assistants' roles. The study reveals that 53% of teaching assistants experienced physical violence, indicating a significant prevalence of violence in this demographic. The authors argue for recognizing the gendered context of this violence and suggest adapting existing strategies for addressing gender-based violence in schools.
Horeck, 2023	This paper examines how British secondary school students responded to the increased public awareness of sexual violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Based on a study conducted in five secondary schools from 2021 to 2022, it highlights gendered differences in awareness of violence against girls and women. The study focuses on students' reactions to two major media stories: Sarah Everard's kidnapping and murder, and the viral spread of sexual abuse testimonies on the 'Everyone's Invited' platform. The findings show that girls were more likely to recognize and discuss sexual violence, partly due to feminist consciousness-raising via digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok during lockdown. While some boys acknowledged the issue, many were less aware of the events and tended to adopt defensive attitudes, including discourses of male victimhood and skepticism about the prevalence of violence against women. However, involving boys in discussions about power and privilege helped challenge these views and counteract rape myths and anti-feminist narratives.
Islington Council, 2020	In 2016, four young people died due to knife crime, making it a priority issue. Fear of crime is a daily reality for children in Islington. It's important to view young people involved in crime as children first. While drugs and gangs are significant issues, many children also experience trauma from family violence or other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Most young people starting interventions are aged 16-17. Of those known to the Youth Offending Service, 199 (35%) had been excluded from school, and 42% had no qualifications. Case studies indicate that frequent school changes, moving house, and having multiple social workers are common among young people who get involved in crime. Black Caribbean boys are over-represented among those involved in

	violence and crime, while Black African boys are over-represented among Looked After Children and Children in Need. A snapshot from January 2020 found that more than 50% of the Youth Offending Service cohort had special educational needs.
Jalali, 2018	The paper explores the long-term inclusion of students with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties in mainstream education, often leading to continuous referrals to alternative provisions. This study examined whether student views change across Primary and Secondary education. Thirteen interviews were conducted with students aged 7–16 years from three Pupil Referral Units. The findings indicate stability in external attributions and supportive factors, but views on reintegration differed, with Secondary students expressing low self-worth. The study highlights mutual perspectives and suggests that alternative provision may exacerbate mental health difficulties. It recommends using cognitive behavioural frameworks and improving shared responsibility between education providers.
Jankowiak, 2020	The paper examines the role of school social support and school social climate in preventing dating violence victimization among adolescents in Europe. The study involved secondary school students aged 13-16 from Spain, Italy, Romania, Portugal, Poland, and the UK, focusing on those with dating experience (n = 993). School social support was measured using the School Social Climate, Factor 1 Scale (CECSCE) and the Student Social Support Scale (CASSS), with subscales for teachers and classmates. The findings indicate that students who experienced dating violence or fear had significantly lower levels of social support. Increased school social support was associated with a decreased likelihood of physical and/or sexual dating violence, and a better school social climate was linked to reduced fear. The study suggests that building a supportive school climate and leveraging peer and teacher support are crucial in preventing dating violence among adolescents.
Jerome, 2019	The Prevent duty, introduced by the 2015 UK Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, mandates that teachers and public-sector employees prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism, integrating this duty into the safeguarding framework. Schools are encouraged to protect children from radicalization and build resilience through the curriculum. In 2015, over 7,000 referrals were made to the Channel programme, mostly from the education sector. Evidence suggests that Muslim students and staff feel the Prevent duty's impact more acutely. This duty adds to the extensive list of safeguarding responsibilities, emphasizing the protection of young people from radicalization and extremism. While it introduces a security-led role for schools, potentially confusing the teacher-student relationship, framing it within safeguarding makes it more recognisable. Schools' existing safeguarding infrastructures help them engage with the Prevent duty, though teachers may feel uncertain about understanding the radicalization process.

Joseph-Salisbury, 2021	This paper discussed the resurgence of calls to increase police presence in English schools due to concerns about serious youth violence. Following interviews with 24 secondary school teachers, arguments against police in schools focus on negatively affecting the learning environment, creating a culture of low expectations, criminalising young people and feed a *school-to-prison pipeline*. Noting that racially minoritized students will be affected most harshly, the article warns against the presence of police in schools.
Kasstan, 2022	This paper examines the impact of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements on revealing sexual abuse in religious institutions, focusing on peer offences in religious schools. It explores how digital reporting platforms, like Everyone's Invited, highlight adolescent agency and provoke policy responses regarding the accountability of religious institutions. The study analyses anonymous digital testimonies alongside interviews with educators, parents, and youths in Jewish schools in Britain. Findings show that these digital revelations call for accountability from faith schools, triggering debates among educators about balancing youth protection and religious self-protectionism. The paper highlights the role of youth in shaming peer abusers and religious authorities, revealing tensions over accountability through online shaming.
Kensit, 2024	This report explores strategies to combat adolescent relationship abuse (ARA) using a transformative justice approach, focusing on prevention, intervention, and healing. The report highlights the need for comprehensive, inclusive Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and community-based learning to prevent ARA. It advocates for non-punitive, holistic interventions for young people causing harm and stresses the importance of long-term, wrap-around support for young survivors. The report underscores the necessity of addressing systemic issues like racism, poverty, and sexism that perpetuate violence. The report draws on insights from various experts and organizations in the USA, suggesting that the UK can benefit from similar approaches.
Langhoff, 2024	This paper presents a mixed methods study of child criminal exploitation (CCE), focusing on county lines in three local authorities in southeast England. The study analyses experiences of CCE and safeguarding responses. Data were collected from surveys, interviews, and focus groups with professionals, parents, and young people. Findings reveal that while professionals are aware of the contexts and relational power dynamics, they often overlook the situated and temporal nature of CCE within safeguarding systems. More space, time, and support are needed for professionals to engage fully with young people and their families. The study highlights the lack of provision for young people's actual needs, often leaving professionals feeling helpless. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the complex dynamics of CCE and calls for more flexible and supportive safeguarding practices.
Littler, 2019	This study aimed to understand school nurses experiences of safeguarding adolescents. Interview with 15 nurses revealed four key categories: the importance of education, targeted interventions, the rise in safeguarding risks such as child sexual exploitation and

	mental health issues, and the significance of supervision and teamwork. The findings underscore the critical role of school nurses in safeguarding but also highlight the need for further research to fully understand this multifaceted area of practice.
Lloyd, 2019	This article focuses on responses and interventions to harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) in schools. Using evidence from focus groups, observations, case reviews, and policy analysis, findings highlights that many schools prioritize individual responses to incidents, often neglecting systemic factors that contribute to HSB. The paper advocates for interventions that address the broader school environment and community contexts to effectively combat HSB.
Lloyd, 2020	Using mixed methods data this paper explores school responses to adolescent sexual image sharing. The findings suggest that responses should go beyond mere risk aversion and challenge the socio-cultural systems that enable such abuse. Schools often confuse consensual and non-consensual sharing, leading to ineffective incident management. Recommendations advocate for creating safer school environments and highlights the importance of collaboration with external agencies.
Lloyd (et al), 2020	This paper explores the need for improved social care assessments to address harmful sexual behaviours (HSBs) in schools, highlighting that current frameworks primarily focus on young people and their families, neglecting school environments. Synthesized findings from two studies highlight the value of exploring school contexts when assessing the nature of extrafamilial abuse; the opportunities and challenges of utilizing research methods for assessing school environments; and the role new assessment frameworks could play in supporting the inclusion of school contexts, and research methods, into welfare assessments of extrafamilial abuse. The paper advocates for multi-agency collaboration to enhance child protection systems in educational settings.
Lloyd (and Bradbury), 2023	Using mixed methods data this paper explores the impact of zero tolerance policies drawing upon school policies and practices, coupled with students' experiences. Findings highlight that where schools drew on punitive and sanctions-based approaches these impacted student disclosure, limited staff decision making, and were not seen to be effective by students. Rather than zero tolerance policies, the findings evidence the need to: tackle environments where sexual harm is tolerated; consider systemic barriers to disclosure, and expand what justice means for responses to sexual harm in schools
Lloyd (and Walker), 2023	This article examines how schools are addressing harmful sexual behaviour among students. The article presents findings from 14 school audits, highlighting areas where schools believe they are performing well and areas where they rate themselves lowest. The analysis shows that while schools are adept at developing statutory policy processes, they struggle more with addressing the

	cultural factors that contribute to harmful and unsafe environments. These findings have significant implications for how schools are supported in tackling sexual harm and what drives change in this area.
Longworth, 2024	Overview of JTAI Leeds: Policy and Its Use: The Leeds Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) has formed new subgroups targeting serious youth violence and child exploitation. These include Project Shield for enhanced information-sharing and the Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) pathway for statutory child protection planning. Effectiveness of Interventions: Strong multi-agency relationships and early intervention strategies are proving effective. Initiatives like Project Shield and the CATCH Centre are showing positive outcomes in diverting children from violence and crime. Barriers and Inequities: Challenges and inequities in addressing serious youth violence include long waiting times for mental health services (CAMHS), inconsistent information sharing by police, and overlapping multi-agency meetings. Best Practice in Safeguarding: Best practices involve trauma-informed approaches, data-driven interventions by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership, proactive school engagement, and the Youth Justice Service's tiered risk management model.
Macdonald, 2024	Overview of JTAI Coventry: Area of Concern: Communication with GPs and acute health services. There are gaps in provision during transitions between schools at each stage. Policies and Their Use: The Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) implements a public health approach and has established the Coventry Serious Violence Prevention Partnership. This partnership has strong links to the West Midlands Regional Violence Reduction Partnership to address serious youth violence and criminal exploitation. Effectiveness of Interventions: Effective multi-agency partnerships and tailored interventions have reduced risks for children, with a strong focus on prevention and early intervention. The Horizon Team and other initiatives provide targeted support. Barriers and Inequities: The Emergency Duty Team provides minimal safeguarding response outside office hours, delaying strategy meetings and immediate protection plans. Children also face long waits for mental health assessments and initial health assessments when they become looked after. Best Practice in Safeguarding: A well-embedded trauma-informed approach across agencies supports reflective practice. Effective strategic partnerships and community engagement inform service developments and reduce risks.

Maguire, 2023	This qualitative study in Northern Ireland, explores young people's views and experiences of domestic violence (DV) education. Conducted with 188 pupils aged 16 to 18, the study identifies five barriers to effective DV education: Absence of DV teaching and learning, DV being a taboo topic, Lack of teacher training and expertise on DV, Religious influence, Prioritisation of academic achievement over pupil wellbeing. The findings highlight the need for changes in schools to enhance their role in addressing DV. The study makes recommendations on how school-based DV education can help prevent and protect young people from intimate partner violence.
Marshall, 2023	Overview of JTAI Manchester: Policies and Their Use: The Manchester Safeguarding Partnership (MSP) has established a serious violence board in collaboration with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to address serious youth violence, with support from the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). Effectiveness of Interventions: Innovative interventions and projects, such as the Engage project and the Complex Safeguarding Hub (CSH), are positively impacting risk reduction and child support. Barriers and Inequities: There is a lack of a comprehensive approach to monitor and evaluate intervention effectiveness, and inconsistent application of child protection thresholds and responses for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Best Practice in Safeguarding: Strong relationship-based practice and trauma-informed approaches are effectively engaging children and reducing risks, supported by community-led initiatives and a robust multi-agency framework.
Martin-Denham, 2020	The research aimed to investigate if drug misuse is an indicator and predictor of barriers to mainstream schooling and school exclusion. Interviews with four caregivers of young people with multiple fixed-period and permanent exclusions from mainstream schools in England, the findings highlight the negative impact of school exclusion and drug misuse on caregivers' mental health, highlighting the need for timely support from education and health professionals. The paper advocates for holistic support for families and improved collaboration among multi-agency services to effectively address these issues.
McSherry, 2024	Overview of JTAI London Borough of Merton: Policies and Their Use: The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) implements comprehensive joint contextual safeguarding strategies and collaborates with the London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and the 'Safer Merton' Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to address serious youth violence and criminal exploitation.

	Effectiveness of Interventions: Effective multi-agency partnerships and targeted initiatives have reduced knife-enabled violence by 8% and serious violent robberies by 16%. These efforts are supported by strong multi-agency relationships and coordinated care for children at risk. Barriers and Inequities: There is a lack of a cohesive child-centred policing policy and inconsistent training for police officers. Additionally, there are delays in identifying and supporting children with neurodiverse and social communication needs. Best Practice in Safeguarding: Strong multi-agency relationships, effective communication, and innovative projects like 'Gloves Not Gunz' and Operation Hambling provide targeted support and diversion activities for children at risk.
Meiksin, 2020	The study assessed the feasibility and contextual enablers/barriers of implementing Project Respect, a whole-school intervention aimed at preventing dating violence. Conducted in six English secondary schools, the intervention included training, policy review, mapping and patrolling hotspots, parent information, a help-seeking app, and a curriculum with student-led campaigns. The process evaluation, which included fidelity assessments and interviews with trainers and school staff, found that while some components were delivered effectively, others were not fully implemented. Implementation was more successful where staff prioritized dating violence, but was hindered by insufficient staff involvement, lack of planning time, and new school challenges. The study suggests that school-based health interventions need to build staff buy-in and avoid overburdening schools. It recommends integrating dating violence education into a broader curriculum on healthy relationships and gender norms.
Neale, 2019	This paper aimed to examine methods for reducing adolescent aggression by implementing a proactive intervention programme within a college's tutorial programme. The programme included three workshops focused on social skills training, problem-solving, anger management, empathy development, bystander education, and victimisation prevention strategies, involving 158 participants. Two self-report questionnaires were administered before and after the intervention to measure attitudes towards physical and relational aggression, victimisation, popularity, bystander beliefs, and empathy. A control group completed the same questionnaires without the intervention. Results showed a significant decrease in aggression scores for the intervention group compared to the control group. Additionally, popularity was positively correlated with both physical and relational aggression. The study underscores the importance of intervention programmes in educational settings to foster prosocial attitudes and ensure student safety.
Neaverson, 2023	This paper highlights the experiences of frontline practitioners responses to child exploitation by county line gangs (CLGs). Conducted through focus groups with 13 youth practitioners, school staff, and charities, the research highlights barriers faced in addressing child criminal exploitation by CLGs. Key findings include the exacerbation of grooming risks due to school exclusions

	and a lack of prosocial belonging. The absence of significant adult relationships, attributed to insufficient funding and resources, hinders successful multi-agency interventions. The study underscores the importance of cross-sector collaboration and identifies challenges in multi-agency approaches, offering recommendations for improvement. Understanding these barriers can help develop measures to better safeguard vulnerable children from exploitation by CLGs.
Ofsted, 2019	Knife crime: safeguarding children and young people in education. Ofsted carried out research in 29 schools, colleges and pupil referral units (PRUs) in London. No single agency, including schools, can solve knife crime alone. Schools, colleges, and PRUs need to be involved in developing and implementing local strategies to prevent knife crime and serious youth violence (SYV). Schools often feel isolated and lack direction and planning. Local authorities should have a strategic response to permanent exclusions and challenge schools and trusts when exclusions do not align with statutory guidance. Safeguarding partners should involve school leaders at a strategic level in assessing the needs of children and young people (CYP) and planning service responses. Schools and colleges should share comprehensive information when a student moves to safeguard them and others. The PSHE curriculum should reflect local safeguarding issues and trends. Safeguarding partnerships and school leaders should raise awareness among parents and children. Knife crime is linked to multiple vulnerabilities, including poverty, abuse, neglect, and social exclusion. Safety concerns are particularly high before and after school, especially between 4-6 pm.
Ofsted, 2021	Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. The report presents findings and recommendations on sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse. Over 900 children and young people (CYP) from 32 schools and colleges were interviewed. It was found that incidents of harassment and online sexual abuse are so widespread that CYP often see no point in reporting them. Girls, in particular, were reluctant to report or discuss abuse due to fears of being ostracised, getting peers in trouble, facing repercussions, not being believed, or being blamed. Instead, they turn to social media and peers for education, as the RSHE curriculum does not adequately equip them. Teachers and leaders underestimated the scale of the problem. The report recommends that schools operate under the assumption that abuse, including online abuse, is occurring and address it accordingly. Local safeguarding partners (LSPs) had varying levels of awareness, with some unaware of any sexual harassment or violence in their area. More effective collaboration is needed between LSPs and schools and colleges.
Ofsted, 2024	JTAI Multi-agency response to serious youth violence. The report examines the effectiveness of strategic responses, work with affected children, and interventions in high-crime areas. It highlights the importance of considering the views and experiences of children, their families, and communities. The findings emphasize the need for strong multi-agency collaboration and identify

	effective practices and areas needing improvement. The report also underscores the links between serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation, aiming to enhance the safety and well-being of children and communities
Old, 2024	Overview of JTAI Lancashire Policies and Their Use Lancashire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP): Recently introduced new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and an adolescent service, including the Empower teams, to tackle serious youth violence and criminal exploitation. Effectiveness of Interventions Public Health and Trauma-Informed Approach: The partnership's public health and trauma-informed response, supported by the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network (LVRN), is making a positive impact on children's lives by reducing risks and steering them away from violence and crime. Barriers and Inequities Recognition and Response: There is inconsistent application of child protection thresholds, inadequate response to the increased vulnerability of children with special educational needs and neurodiversity, and delays in accessing specialist health assessments. Best Practice in Safeguarding Community-Led Initiatives: Effective place-based interventions and community-led initiatives, such as targeted youth groups and the VRN champions programme, are successfully educating and diverting children from serious youth violence and criminal exploitation.
Osthwaite, 2022	Safeguarding partners annual reports for 2020-21. This report takes a selection of reports from LSPs and analyses them according to 3 key themes: Prioritisation, progress and impact; Dissemination and embedding of learning; and meeting the requirements of Working Together 2018. They found that compliance with the recommendations found in the Working Together report was lacking. Safeguarding priorities are focused on neglect, domestic abuse, emotional/ mental wellbeing, exploitation, contextual safeguarding and online safety.
Parish, 2020	The statutory definition for Children Missing Education states that "Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school." There are numerous reasons why pupils miss school, leading to eight main destinations.

	Children today have more needs, while schools have less time and space to support them. It is crucial to raise awareness about those missing education. Recommendation: Create a learning environment where more students can succeed. Pupils not in education often have complex needs related to deprivation and poverty, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Some schools manipulate the system by only including pupils who perform well in their statistics (p.32). Young people who are excluded or off-rolled have higher chances of becoming involved in gang activity (p.40). There are, however, good case examples of meaningful intervention.
Pickles, 2021	This paper explores the experiences and perceptions of hate crime among LGBT+ young people (aged 15–22) through two design-led workshops in the North East of England. The first workshop focused on identifying hate scenarios that participants would report to the police, while the second involved designing hate crime reporting devices. The study found that young people were hesitant to report their victimization to the police due to its connection with people they knew, such as parents, school peers, and acquaintances. They expressed a need for various response options when reporting victimization. The article argues that bullying and anti-LGBT+ hate crimes are similarly tangible. While youth victimization is often seen as bullying involving peers, adult victimization is viewed as hate crime.
Ponsford, 2022	This paper presents a systematic review and synthesis of process evaluations, guided by May's General Theory of Implementation. The review encompassed 16 reports from 13 studies and 10 interventions. Key findings include that school staff had a better understanding of implementation requirements when provided with high-quality materials and support. However, staff commitment was hindered by a lack of intervention adaptability. Providing local data helped build commitment, and school leaders were more likely to support interventions addressing pre-existing issues. Collaborative planning groups, along with sufficient time, leadership, and relationships, were crucial for effective implementation. Regular progress reviews were essential for assessing and enhancing implementation, with 'quick wins' helping to maintain momentum.
Rees, 2020	StreetDoctors teach first aid skills to young people affected by violence, collaborating with the criminal justice system, schools, pupil referral units (PRUs), and youth, sport, and community groups. Their trauma-informed approach helps them understand the medical and psychological consequences of violence. The top five areas with increasing levels of youth violence are Blackpool, Salford, Kingston upon Hull, Southampton, and Liverpool.

Sadjadi, 2021	This systematic review examines factors influencing the implementation of Health-Promoting School (HPS) interventions aimed at reducing bullying, aggression, or violence. A comprehensive search of 12 databases identified 20 reports from 17 studies. Thematic synthesis revealed that successful implementation is facilitated by program characteristics and stakeholder buy-in, including support from leadership, teachers, students, and parents. Effective communication and a positive staff climate were crucial. Interventions were more successful when health promotion was integrated as a core school activity, supported by national policy, and when local data demonstrated need and effectiveness. High-quality, practical, and accessible staff training also played a significant role.
Shah, 2022	This study investigates whether bullying or cyberbullying victimization is linked to subsequent health risk-taking behaviours in adolescence, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use, early sexual activity, weapon carrying, property damage, and arson. Using data from 3,337 English secondary school students in the INCLUSIVE trial, bullying was assessed at age 11/12. Logistic regression tested associations between bullying at baseline and risk-taking behaviours at 36 months. Results showed a strong positive association between bullying and most risk-taking behaviours, except weapon carrying. However, cyberbullying was linked to weapon carrying. The study suggests that bullying increases the likelihood of risk-taking behaviours, highlighting the need for effective antibullying interventions.
Smith, 2019	APPG on Knife Crime. Over 17,500 boys in England and Wales carry a knife, with a third having had weapons used against them. The number of children excluded from schools has risen since 2013. Some children feel unsupported by schools when they start getting into trouble, and zero tolerance policies are seen as unhelpful. Exclusion from school often leads to more involvement in crime and violence, with many local authorities lacking alternative provision. Schools should play a central role in multi-agency responses, with clear protocols and access to full-time education for all excluded children. Early intervention and support for mental health and home issues are crucial. Recommendations include funding for schools to support vulnerable children, capacity for local authorities to fulfill educational obligations, training in vulnerability and trauma, and considering excluded students in school rankings.
Smith (et al.), 2019	This study uses longitudinal data from the ALSPAC cohort to examine individual, peer, and community risk factors for youth gang membership. Gang membership was linked to drug use, delinquent peers, and disorganised neighbourhoods, but not to early diagnoses of childhood aggression, ADHD, depression, or Oppositional Defiant Disorder. The study suggests that community-based programs focusing on social learning and collective efficacy can help prevent gang growth. Peer and community risk factors were

	stronger predictors of gang membership than individual psychological factors. The gender gap in gang membership may be closing, and further research should explore pathways to gang involvement and the impact of early life experiences
Smith, 2022	This retrospective service evaluation of the first 500 referrals to a new community forensic service (FCAMHS) aimed to understand the impact of changes in health service care models and diversion from youth justice services in England. The evaluation focused on accessibility for preventing high-risk behaviours in young people up to age 18. Most referrals were for aggression, harmful sexual behaviour, and fire setting, with an average age of 14. Half had no formal mental health diagnosis or criminal status, though a quarter had neurodevelopmental disorders. Despite fewer female referrals, reasons were similar to males. The evaluation highlights a shift towards early intervention and a flexible, accessible model of care in forensic services
Stanley, 2023	This study examines the impact of the Speak Out Stay Safe (SOSS) programme, an integrated violence and abuse prevention initiative for children under 12. Using a matched control study with economic and process evaluations, the study involved 1,553 children from 36 UK primary schools. At 6 months follow-up, children aged 9-10 who received SOSS retained improved knowledge of neglect and could identify a trusted adult for reporting abuse. However, children aged 6-7 and boys benefited less. SOSS was particularly effective for children with initially low knowledge of abuse. The programme's impact was closely linked to school culture. The study concludes that school-based prevention programmes are cost-effective but must be tailored to specific school contexts to be effective.
Stephens, 2021	This study aimed to understand the role of school nurses in addressing serious youth violence. Using a mixed-method approach, results found no evidence of interventions to reduce youth violence. While staff acknowledged their role in educating and identifying vulnerable children, they lacked confidence and sought more support. Most school nurse activities involved safeguarding, with only nine out of 62 emergency referrals followed up face-to-face. The study concludes that although school nurses recognize their role, they are not effectively practicing it, indicating a need for changes to better prevent and reduce serious youth violence.
The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2024	Safeguarding children in elective home education. The aim of the briefing is to share learning from analyses of rapid reviews and local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPRs) to inform the work of safeguarding partners. The overlap between education governance and system mapping is evident. Future recommendations are provided. A significant issue is the lack of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) provision, which drives many decisions. Schools often pressure parents while offering minimal support for their children. There is limited understanding of children withdrawn for faith or cultural reasons. Additionally, parents

	may not fully grasp the commitment required for home education. Some parents have also challenged or evaded professionals, diverting attention from the core issues.
Temple, 2020	Social isolation can become a significant issue and tipping point after exclusion. Many children in the criminal justice system have been excluded, with some situations manipulated by criminal actors beforehand. Young people often face other social issues, which is crucial to consider. Children outside mainstream education are at higher risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of violent crime. Excluded children, feeling they have no future, are more susceptible to exploitation. Those in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) receive fewer supervised hours per week than in mainstream education, and some disappear from the system entirely. Families may avoid PRUs due to fear of consequences, even when no other placements are available. Institutionalisation in PRUs exposes children to violence, drugs, and gangs. Risks are higher for children with additional needs, family involved in crime, or living in areas of exploitation. Schools often punish through exclusion for safeguarding issues. Protections should be stringent where exclusion furthers exploiters' aims.
Timpson, 2019	Review of school exclusion. This report highlights that exclusions should not be misused by schools (such as off-rolling), education should still be provided for all children, and managed moves should include involvement with the family. Data sharing should be timely.
Thompson, 2019	This study explores the blurred definitions of organized crime and gangs, noting that organized crime can be opportunistic and less hierarchical. Young people's involvement is complex, driven by social networks, economic needs, and family support, often without conscious choice. Vulnerable youths, especially those with learning difficulties, are groomed by organized crime groups. Current policies focus on punitive measures rather than addressing underlying vulnerabilities. Effective prevention requires long-term support and positive relationships with professionals. Economic hardship and lack of opportunities push youths towards crime, seeking status and belonging. Family responsibilities also motivate involvement. The study emphasizes the need for holistic policies, recognizing youths as both perpetrators and victims, and highlights the importance of collaborative efforts between criminal justice, social care, and education services.
Walker, 2022	This paper examines the relationship between gender rules in schools and harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) among students, focusing on the role of school institutions in shaping these dynamics. It underscores that schools can either reinforce harmful gender norms or challenge them to foster safer environments for students. Using a mixed-methods approach across seven secondary schools in England, the research found that the normalization of harmful gender constructs is linked to the prevalence

	of HSB. The paper ultimately advocates for schools to take responsibility in creating safe spaces by addressing and transforming harmful gender norms.
Winter, 2024	Overview of JTAI Somerset Policies and Their Use: The Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) lacks a clear strategic approach and overly relies on crime data, leading to an incomplete understanding of children's risks. Governance arrangements are complex, and the effectiveness of commissioned services remains uncertain. Effectiveness of Interventions: Some local initiatives, such as family intervention workers and PCSOs, successfully divert children from violence. However, the overall response is fragmented, with multiple meetings lacking clear ownership, undermining good practice. Barriers and Inequities: Poor information sharing between agencies and a lack of professional curiosity prevent early risk identification. High school exclusion rates and long waiting times for autism assessments increase children's vulnerability to serious youth violence. Best Practice in Safeguarding: Positive relationships between children and early intervention workers, along with involving children in identifying their priorities, are strengths. Local neighbourhood responses and the charity sector provide valuable support.
Wroe, 2021	This paper analyses a county lines safeguarding partnership in a large city region of England, using an analytical framework based on three contextual and social theories of child harm. Using mixed methods the findings highlight critical tensions in multi-agency child welfare responses to county lines. highlights the need for safeguarding partnerships to understand the interconnected conditions of child exploitation, target the contexts where harm occurs, and address social and institutional harms. It emphasizes that interventions should focus on the broader socio-economic dynamics and structural factors contributing to exploitation, rather than solely on individual behaviours, to effectively protect young people from serious youth violence.
Wroe, 2023	This study highlights the lack of evidence supporting 'out-of-area placements' for addressing risks adolescents face beyond the home. About one in ten adolescents in England and Wales are relocated by social care teams due to these risks. Initial findings from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England view these relocations as a failure to safeguard teenagers. Using participatory research methods, the study conducted qualitative interviews with young people, parents, and professionals to assess the impact of relocations on safety. Thematic analysis revealed a tension between what professionals and families

	considered important in planning relocations and ambivalence about their effectiveness. The study suggests considerations for safety planning to address young people's holistic safety needs.
Youth Endowment Fund, 2023	Children, violence and vulnerability: A Youth Endowment Fund report into young people's experiences of violence. This analysis, examines serious violence and vulnerability among children and young people in England and Wales. It highlights trends in key risk factors for youth violence, noting an increase in children at serious risk of harm and the pandemic's impact on violence levels. The research includes a survey of over 2,000 young people, revealing their experiences and perceptions of violence, and focuses on identifying effective interventions to prevent youth involvement in violence. • 16% of teenage children had been a victim of violence in the last 12 months • 47% of teens had been a victim or witness of violence in the last 12 months • 68% of children that were victims said they'd experienced violence that led to physical injuries • 60% of children saw real-world acts of violence on social media, increasing to over 85% of children most at risk of involvement with violence. 29% had seen content relating to weapons. • 47% of children reported that violence and the fear of violence impacted their day-to-day lives • 20% of children (1 in 5) said they'd skipped school due to feeling unsafe. • Victimisation rates were 31% among those now using foodbanks • 62% of children thought that drugs were a major factor and half thought gangs were – the two highest drivers. The findings aim to guide policymakers and frontline workers in better supporting vulnerable children.
Young, 2019	This study aimed to develop a safer sex and healthy relationships intervention for 16-19-year-olds in further education (FE) settings in the UK. Conducted in six FE settings and one sexual health charity, it involved focus groups, interviews, and an e-survey with students, staff, and managers. The study identified four potential intervention components: student-led sexual health action groups, on-site sexual health and relationships services, staff safeguarding training, and sex and relationships education. Findings revealed that on-site services and staff training were critical gaps and well-received, while student-led groups and education were not considered effective. The SaFE intervention, focusing on on-site services and staff training, shows promise for promoting sexual health among FE students, but requires further refinement and stakeholder consultation before piloting in a cluster randomised controlled trial.
Youth Justice Board, 2024	The Youth Justice Board strategy for delivering positive outcomes for children by reducing offending and creating safer communities 2024-2027. The Youth Justice Board's Strategic Plan for 2024-2027 outlines its vision for a youth justice system that

	prioritizes children, treats them fairly, and helps them contribute positively to society. Key objectives include supporting local youth justice services through effective resourcing, setting clear standards, and promoting good practice. The plan emphasizes the importance of addressing racial disparities, improving support for victims, and enhancing services for children in custody. It also stresses the need for collaboration with various stakeholders to implement the Child First approach, promoting pro-social identities, and minimizing contact with the justice system.