REPORT

Education and violence: a policy and practice review of England and Wales

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About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we'll fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activities.

And just as important, is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure they influence our work and that we understand and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that stay on a shelf.

Together, we need to look at the evidence and agree on what works, then build a movement to make sure that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do it. At its heart, it says that we will fund good work, find what works and work for change. You can read it here.

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Abbreviations

ALN	Additional learning needs
AP	Alternative provision
APST	Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce
CAMHS	Children and adolescent mental health services
CPD	Continuing professional development
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CQC	Care Quality Commission
DfE	Department for Education
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EHC plan	Education, health and care plan
EOTAS	Education other than at school
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
EYST	Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team
FSM	Free school meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GP	General Practice
ITE	Initial teacher education
ITT	Initial teacher training
KS	Key Stage
LA	Local authority
MAT	Multi-academy trust
NFER	National Foundation For Educational Research
NPQ	National professional qualification

Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PDG	Pupil Development Grant
PSHE education	Personal, social, health and economic education
PRU	Pupil referral unit
QTS	Qualified teacher status
RSG	Revenue Support Grant
RSE	Relationships and sex education
SAT	Single academy trust
SEMH	Social, emotional or mental health
SEN	Special educational needs
YEF	Youth Endowment Fund

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Executive summary

Rationale for this study

The last decade has seen rising involvement of children in violence across England and Wales. While one in four teenage children report being involved in violence, we know children with additional needs are disproportionately affected (Youth Endowment Fund [YEF], 2023a). Urgent action is required to turn these trends around.

As the service that children are most in touch with, schools play an increasingly critical role in keeping children safe from violence. To support this vital work, the YEF recommends a number of effective practices focused on keeping children in education, providing trusted adults and developing their social and emotional skills (YEF, 2024b). These practices can make a real difference in children's lives, mitigating vulnerabilities and building resilience to violence.

Education settings cannot, however, autonomously act to reduce violence. The policy and system context in which they operate profoundly shapes – and often limits – their ability to deliver what works.

The primary aim of this study, commissioned by the YEF, is to identify what needs to change at the policy and system levels to empower more education settings to reduce violence.

Our report dives into the education policy and system landscape in England and Wales, examining how it influences the practices that education settings can implement. We explore what current practice looks like, highlight examples of promising approaches and pinpoint the barriers preventing broader adoption of successful strategies. Finally, the report presents a set of five actionable suggestions for policy and system change grounded in the evidence on what would help to strengthen practice and transform children's outcomes.

Our intention is that the findings of this report, and particularly the policy and system changes we suggest, will help guide education policymakers as they work to support the education system and make meaningful progress in preventing children's involvement in violence.

Methods

Our methodology combined:

- Extensive review of existing policy, evidence and literature
- Qualitative interviews with 50 education stakeholders working within and with schools in England and Wales
- Light-touch case studies of practice aligned with YEF recommendations (set out as spotlights on practice in this report)
- A Delphi consultation to test and validate findings and improve the desirability, feasibility and potential effectiveness of our suggested policy and system changes

Key contributions of the report

This report makes substantive contributions to the policy and practice landscape of violence prevention work in education settings. These contributions are organised into four overarching themes: current policy, current practice, current challenges and policy and system changes that would help improve practice.

Current policy

The suggestions for policy and system change in this report are grounded in an understanding of the current policy context, current practice in education settings and the challenges they face in delivering effective practice to reduce violence. Our report begins by setting out a useful summary of the key policies shaping the practice education settings can deliver to reduce violence.

Current practice

Our report then turns to evidence shedding light on the urgency of the need for better systems and policies to support education settings to keep children in education. Exploring quantitative trends in outcomes, we show that while attendance has dropped, suspensions and exclusions from school have risen in both England and Wales since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic around five years ago – with suspensions in England at an all-time high. We also highlight disproportionalities across these outcomes patterned by ethnicity, gender, special education needs and household deprivation, demonstrating how far there is still to go in achieving equitable outcomes for children in mainstream settings and alternative provision (AP).

We also explore current practice in education to improve attendance, reduce the need for suspensions and exclusions, provide support to excluded pupils, provide trusted adults and develop social and emotional skills. Perhaps our most consistent finding is that this practice is highly inconsistent. There are clear examples of good practice helping to improve pupil outcomes and address disproportionality, which we highlight and celebrate. But we also caution that this good practice is not comprehensively embedded across education systems in England and Wales.

Current challenges

A key contribution of our report is a comprehensive analysis of the challenges that impede the delivery of good practice in education settings to prevent violence.

1. **Children and families face increasingly severe and complex needs**

Growing needs have exacerbated barriers to school attendance and raised the risks of suspensions and exclusions. As needs increase, schools struggle to provide the support children need to overcome them.

2. **External agencies are struggling to provide effective, timely, coordinated support to meet children's needs**

Local support services, including children's social care, mental health services and youth work organisations, are under significant financial strain and are struggling to meet demand. In the absence of a well-functioning ecosystem of local support services for vulnerable children, many mainstream schools, AP settings and pupil referral units (PRUs) feel under increasing pressure to fill gaps in support.

3. **Funding for schools is not adequate to support consistent, effective practice to prevent children's involvement in violence**

Schools in England and Wales are operating within significant financial constraints, with many experiencing budget deficits that affect the level and quality of support they can provide to help vulnerable children and prevent violence.

4. **Alternative provision settings and pupil referral units face particular challenges in delivering support for children who have experienced or are at risk of exclusion**

Many of these education settings in England and Wales are operating beyond their intended capacity due to increases in the number of pupils being suspended and excluded, the length of time pupils remain with them and the severity of pupils' needs.

5. **The landscape of different school types can impede the coordination of support for vulnerable pupils**

Given the need for partnerships between schools and local authorities, the complex landscape of different school types in England can pose challenges for the development and delivery of coordinated plans for supporting children in some local areas. While there is variation in how well schools engage with local services, local authorities lack levers for encouraging cooperation among multi-academy trusts.

6. **The focus and scope of the national curriculum in England is not conducive to effective violence prevention**

The national curriculum places inadequate focus on the development of the social and emotional skills that are essential for bolstering children's resilience to violence. Further, the quality of relationships and sex education are highly inconsistent, with teaching often not delivered by specialist teachers, despite evidence that high-quality education on relationships is a protective factor against relationship-based violence among young people.

7. **How schools are held to account in England can create challenges for the delivery of effective practice to prevent violence**

Schools in England feel pressure to focus limited resources on the academic subjects that contribute most to the key performance measures on which they are held to account (which pulls resource away from other foci that are vital to violence prevention), while inadequate rewards for inclusive practice are provided by the schools inspectorate.

8. **Staff in schools do not always have the right training or skills to help prevent children's involvement in violence**

Important skills gaps exist around understanding and supporting children with special educational needs (SEN) and experiences of AP and PRU settings; using evidence-based approaches to address disruptive behaviours in ways that support behaviour change; supporting the development of social and emotional skills; and implementing whole-school approaches to anti-racism. These skills gaps are attributable to a lack of adequate focus on these areas in initial teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD) for school staff.

9. **Schools struggle to recruit and retain staff, constraining their ability to provide consistent practice and continuity of support**

Recruitment and retention challenges in schools make it more difficult to build trusting relationships and deliver continuity of support and consistent practice. Pay, conditions and pressures on staff leading to burnout contribute to these difficulties, with rural schools, AP and PRUs, and special education settings facing particular difficulties.

10. **Specific challenges impede the achievement of racially equitable practice and outcomes**

In the context of a predominantly middle-class and white school workforce, ensuring all staff have the knowledge and skills to deliver culturally competent, inclusive practice in schools is a challenge. There are concerns that, for example, adultification of Black children contributes to disproportionate exclusion rates for Black children, while the inconsistent application of explicitly anti-racist approaches may leave children of minoritised ethnicities feeling less safe and able to engage in schooling.

11. **School behaviour policies that do not place adequate focus on identifying and addressing pupils' additional needs may create barriers to good practice to reduce children's involvement in violence**

There is a need to strengthen the evidence base on effective school behaviour policies. The evidence does show, however, that such policies need to enable school staff to identify underlying needs (such as SEN) and, when appropriate, tailor responses to individual pupils' circumstances. The implementation of behaviour policies that rely on default responses may

make it more difficult to deliver effective practice that supports behaviour change among pupils who need more tailored support to address their behaviour.

12. **Some schools are unfamiliar with guidance on what works to prevent children's involvement in violence**

There is a lack of awareness in some schools of robust evidence from research and evaluation on what school-based practices and interventions work best to prevent violence.

13. **Some schools struggle to capture, analyse and use pupil data to inform the delivery of effective and equitable violence prevention practice**

Some schools lack the pupil-level data and analyses they need to ensure that the delivery of practice is informed by an understanding of pupils' educational needs, experiences and outcomes.

Implications for policy and system change

Our findings demonstrate that, as schools strive to address the needs of vulnerable pupils, they are frequently hindered by systemic obstacles that undermine their ability to implement effective practice to prevent violence. The key to improving outcomes lies in addressing these constraints.

Our report contributes to this goal by providing a set of actionable steps that should be taken to leverage the existing evidence base in a more effective way. We call for the following specific, meaningful policy and system changes to enable the integration of evidence-based practice within schools and enhance the capacity to prevent violence.

Policy implication 1: establish a new Pastoral Premium grant for pupils with the greatest vulnerability to the risk of involvement in violence to help schools keep them safe by providing evidence-based approaches that help keep children in education, provide trusted adults and support the development of social and emotional skills.

Why? Our review found not only that funding is a key barrier to effective violence prevention but also that schools are often unsure of how to ensure their stretched budgets are invested in effective approaches to violence prevention.

Policy implication 2: use cross-government funding to implement hubs based in schools, with co-located workers from local support services and organisations working together to support children, including by sharing information, upskilling each other in best practice and coordinating support.

Why? While children face increasingly severe and complex needs, schools and external agencies are struggling to coordinate the provision of effective, timely support to meet those needs.

Policy implication 3: ensure the ongoing review of the national curriculum in England results in an updated curriculum that better supports schools in preventing violence, giving greater priority to developing social and emotional skills and relationships and sex education.

Why? High-quality education on relationships (including relationship violence prevention sessions) and the development of children's social and emotional skills are known to be protective factors against involvement in violence, but this teaching in England is highly inconsistent and often falls short.

Policy implication 4: update initial training and CPD for all school staff to equip them to keep children safe from violence and meet the requirements of the new national curriculum, with a focus on supporting children with SEN and AP experiences, implementing evidence-based approaches to understanding and managing behaviour effectively, developing pupils' social and emotional skills, ensuring anti-racist practice and preventing bullying.

Why? Given the complexity and severity of children's needs, the delivery of effective practice to prevent violence demands an education workforce with a broad set of highly developed skills. Currently, however, there is inadequate focus on these crucial areas in initial training and CPD for school staff.

Policy implication 5: ensure upcoming changes by Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) include a focus on inclusivity, equity and good practice to reduce violence, accounting for the challenges faced by schools that serve cohorts with particularly high needs, vulnerabilities and disadvantages and rewarding inclusive practice

Why? Ofsted's recently announced plans offer a meaningful opportunity to transform a key element of the accountability system and remove the current perverse incentives that militate against the delivery of effective violence prevention and inclusive practice in schools.

Introduction

Rationale for this study

Over the last decade, children's involvement in violence in England and Wales has risen.[1] According to the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), one in four teenage children reported being involved in violence in 2023, and some children are disproportionately affected (YEF, 2024a).[2]

In the context of rising violence, education settings play an increasingly important role in keeping children safe. As the service that children are most in touch with, schools are well-positioned to understand their pupils, notice when issues arise and help address risks and harms.

Over the last year, YEF has worked with schools, colleges, alternative provision (AP) settings, children, teachers and education leaders to develop guidance on good practice for education settings to keep children safe from violence. Their report, 'Education, children and violence: guidance for school, college and AP leaders to help prevent children's involvement in violence', hereafter referred to as the 'YEF practice guidance', sets out five key recommendations for education settings (YEF, 2024a). The recommendations are:

1. Keep children in education
2. Provide children with trusted adults
3. Develop children's social and emotional skills
4. Target efforts at the places and times where violence occurs
5. Cautiously consider unproven strategies and avoid harmful approaches

The YEF recognises, however, that schools, colleges and AP settings cannot single-handedly reduce violence. The policy and system context in which they operate influences and limits their ability to deliver what works.

This study was therefore commissioned by the YEF to identify key aspects of the policy and system context in England and Wales that shape what practices education settings are able

[1] According to government data, more young people lost their lives to violence or were admitted to hospital for knife crime in 2022/23 than in 2012/13, with these numbers rising over the last decade and peaking in 2017/18 and 2018/19, respectively (YEF, 2024). Government data also shows that in 2022/23, more children were becoming involved in the youth justice system than in previous years, with an increase in arrests, sentencing of children at courts, and the number of child first-time entrants to the criminal justice system all for the first time in 10 years (DfE, 2024k).

[2] Those who are disproportionately affected include boys, children from Black backgrounds, children living in highly deprived areas, and children living in London, the West Midlands, and West Yorkshire (YEF, 2024).

to deliver; what current practice looks like, including examples of promising practices in line with their recommendations; the barriers and challenges preventing more education settings from delivering good practice that helps keep children safe from violence; and what needs to change at the policy and system levels to enable more education settings to deliver good practice, particularly in relation to keeping children in education, supporting suspended or excluded children, providing children with trusted adults, and developing children's social and emotional skills.

Our intention is that the findings of this report – and particularly our suggestions for policy and system change – will be of use to education policymakers as they work to support the education system in tackling children's involvement in violence.

Methodology

Research questions

Our research questions are set out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Research questions by theme

Theme 1: current policy
1. What aspects of education policy and funding in England and Wales affect practice in education settings to prevent children's involvement in violence?
Theme 2: current practice
2. What is current practice within education settings regarding violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults, and developing children's social and emotional skills)?
3. What examples are there of current practice in education settings that shows potential promise for violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults, and developing children's social and emotional skills)?

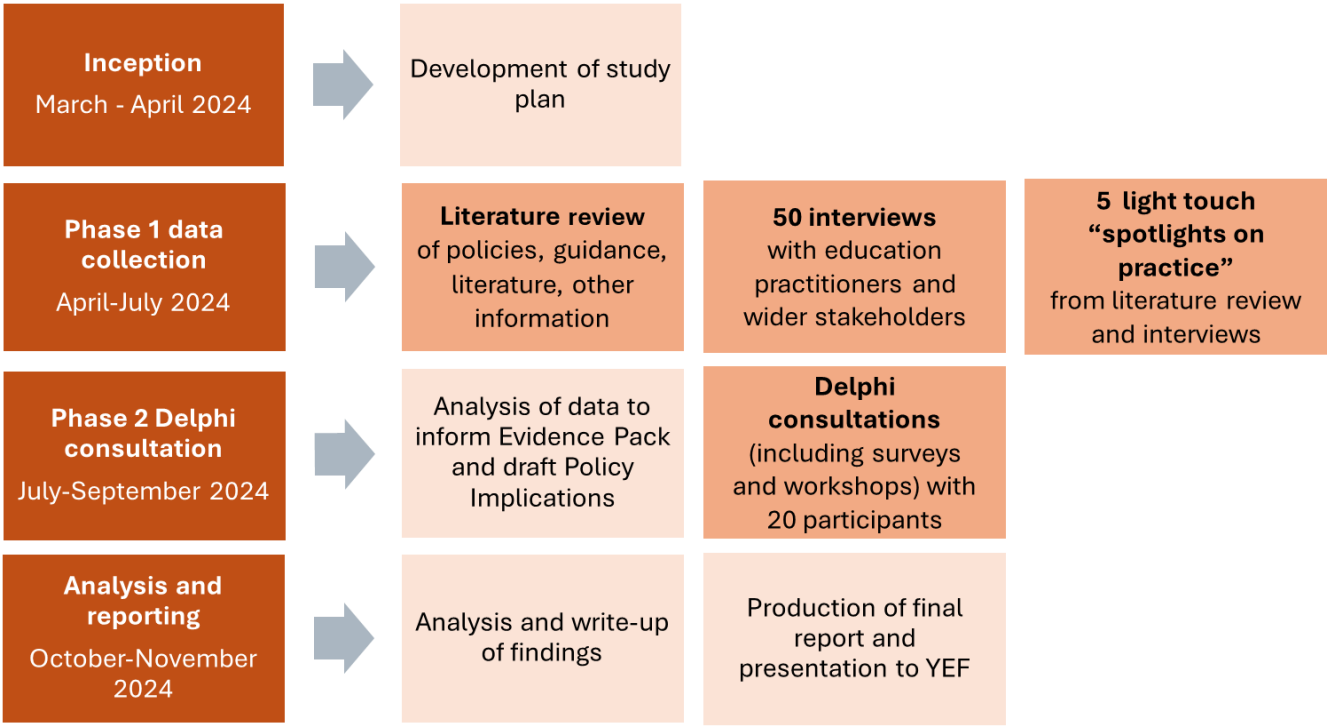
Theme 3: current challenges
4. What is preventing more education settings from delivering good (effective and/or racially equitable and inclusive) practice regarding violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults, and developing children's social and emotional skills)?
Theme 4: policy and system changes to help improve practice
5. What specific policy and system changes would help ensure more education settings are able to deliver good (effective and/or racially equitable and inclusive) practice regarding violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults, and developing children's social and emotional skills)?
6. How do these policy and system changes differ in England and Wales?

Recognising the broad scope of these questions, the study team worked with the YEF to identify the highest priority areas for the study to focus on. Collectively, we identified the **primary purpose of the report as being to identify policy and system changes that are required to enable education settings to deliver better practice that prevents children's involvement in violence** (particularly in relation to keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults, and developing children's social and emotional skills). The major focus of study activities was therefore placed upon Theme 4 (policy and system changes to help improve practice). Themes 1, 2 and 3 (current policy, current practice and current challenges) were primarily explored in order to understand Theme 4.

Methods

Our methodology combined a literature review, qualitative interviews with education stakeholders, light-touch case studies of practice aligned with YEF recommendations (or what we term spotlights on practice) and a Delphi consultation to test and validate findings and suggestions for policy and system changes. A summary of research methods is set out in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Summary of research methods



Literature review

The objectives of our literature review were to:

- Identify key aspects of current policy related to the YEF education practice recommendations
- Identify examples of current relevant practice in education settings, including examples of practice aligned with YEF recommendations
- Identify evidence on challenges for and barriers to the delivery of good practice in education settings to reduce violence
- Summarise relevant key findings from existing quantitative data and analyses on attendance, exclusions, suspensions and AP from an intersectional perspective to capture racial and other disparities
- Inform the development of questions to explore within concurrent interviews and subsequent Delphi consultations

In accordance with our critical interpretive synthesis methodology (see below), we used a theoretical sampling of recent academic and grey literature. We searched Google Search, Google Scholar and Web of Science using search terms related to the various aspects of our

research questions and emerging findings and used cited reference searching. We selected records for inclusion based on relevance to the research questions.[3] We included:

- Policies and guidance from the English and Welsh governments
- Existing research, with a focus on reviews and syntheses
- Existing datasets and analyses
- Records published within the last five years (with older sources included if highly relevant)
- Records in English

We included a total of 172 records in our literature review, including:

- Thirty-eight records of statutory and non-statutory guidance from UK and Welsh government sources
- Seventy-one further records from UK and Welsh government sources (including the UK government, the Welsh government, government departments such as the Department for Education (DfE) and Education Wales, and non-ministerial or non-departmental government bodies, such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted] and Estyn). These include government plans, national frameworks, reports, policy papers, press releases, information, analyses and statistics
- Sixty-three records from non-governmental sources, including journal articles, reports, analyses and commentaries

Interviews

We conducted online, hour-long, one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with key informants to:

- Gather insights from diverse perspectives on current practice, challenges for and barriers to good practice (particularly at the policy and system levels) and what would help improve practice
- Develop our spotlights on practice aligned with YEF recommendations
- Inform the development of areas to explore within the literature review and Delphi consultations

[3] Theoretical sampling involves identifying and selecting literature based on its potential to contribute to the development and refinement of findings.

We interviewed 50 key informants, purposively sampling to reach the following sample sizes:[4]

- **Thirty education practitioners from across England and Wales,** including:
    - Senior leaders working in mainstream schools and the AP/ pupil referral unit (PRU) sector
    - Other school staff, including teachers, mentors and attendance officers
    - Representatives of professional bodies
- **Twenty education system and policy stakeholders from across England and Wales,** including:
    - Representatives of third sector organisations delivering support to children to keep them in education, provide them with trusted adults and develop their social and emotional skills
    - Representatives of policy and advocacy organisations

The sample size of 50 key informants was chosen with the intention that this would enable us to reach sufficient data saturation while balancing pragmatic considerations of the timeline and budget of the research. Towards the end of our interviews, the research team agreed that we had achieved a good level of data saturation: enough rich data from a range of perspectives had been collected to understand themes and patterns within the interview dataset, with very few new insights emerging from the final interviews.

Stakeholders were invited to participate by email and provided with full information about what participation would involve.[5] This included providing them with a participant information sheet and privacy notice. Informed consent to participate was re-sought at the start of each interview.

Case studies

From the literature review and interviews, we identified five examples of practice that were aligned with YEF practice recommendations. Light-touch, high-level case study summaries of these practices are highlighted as spotlights on practice in this report. The examples were purposively sampled in consultation with the YEF to provide balanced coverage of:

[4] Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, involves identifying and recruiting individuals with particular knowledge and expertise related to the topics of interest.

[5] A total of 126 individuals were invited to participate in interviews.

- Types of practice (relating to keeping children in education, providing them with trusted adults, and developing their social and emotional skills)
- Geographical region (England, Wales and areas with high levels of violence affecting young people)
- Types of setting (mainstream schools and AP and PRU settings)
- Different practice models deployed in schools and by third sector organisations to provide support to pupils and families

Delphi consultation with experts

Following the literature review and interviews, we carried out a Delphi consultation exercise, which drew on and adapted the Policy Delphi method, to test and validate our findings and develop actionable suggestions for policy and system change. The steps involved in this Delphi consultation are explained below. More information about Delphi methods can be found in Figure 3 below.

The main aim of this consultation was to identify and refine a set of suggestions for policy and system change that would help address the challenges identified and be viewed as acceptable, feasible and effective by school leaders in England and Wales. Our adapted Policy Delphi approach was well suited to this purpose, enabling the development of our policy suggestions to benefit from the insights of diverse experts in the field of education.

Interviewees were invited to participate in the Delphi consultation at the end of their interviews. Interviewees who granted us permission to re-contact them were then emailed by the study team with full information about the consultation (including a participant information sheet and privacy notice) and invited to confirm their participation. As our Delphi consultation involved participation in workshop discussions, our participants agreed that they would not be anonymous to each other and would uphold the Chatham House Rule.[6]

In total, 20 stakeholders participated in the consultation. All these stakeholders responded to the pre-workshop survey, 11 stakeholders attended Workshop 1 and 8 stakeholders attended Workshop 2.

The remainder of this section sets out the steps followed in the consultation.

[6] Under the Chatham House Rule, participants in a meeting are free to use the information they hear but may not reveal either the identity or the affiliation of any other participant.

Figure 3: The Delphi method

Developed by RAND in the 1950s, the Delphi method is a structured, iterative and anonymous group-based process for eliciting expert judgement and exploring or increasing the degree of consensus on a particular topic. A group of experts are typically asked to respond to a series of questionnaires interspersed with rounds of controlled feedback on questionnaire results. Participants are encouraged to review how their answers compare to those of the group and can revise their answers and provide rationales in the next questionnaire. This iterative process continues until consensus is reached, questionnaire results are stable or a pre-determined number of rounds is completed. The degree of consensus among experts is then assessed. Delphi techniques are highly versatile and have been adapted for use in different settings, technologies and policy areas. One adaptation is Policy Delphi, which aims to find solutions for pressing policy problems. The aim is not to promote consensus but to explore differences of view from a range of diverse perspectives in order to reach informed judgements on policy options. Participants are asked to engage in iterative rounds of votes and discussion on issues such as the likely impact, acceptability and consequences of each policy option.

For more information on the Delphi method, see Khodyakov et al. (2023). For more information on the differences between traditional and Policy Delphi approaches, see Manley (2013).

Step 1: participants received an evidence pack in advance of consultation workshops

The evidence pack was developed by the study team, underwent YEF review and was then shared with participants. It was based on findings from the literature review and interviews and included:

- A summary of findings on the main challenges and barriers found to constrain the ability of education settings in England and Wales to deliver good practice to prevent violence
- Draft policy implications developed by the study team setting out policy and system changes that could help more schools in England and Wales deliver good practice to prevent violence

Sharing an evidence pack is an important part of Delphi methods that helps to ensure all participants begin the consultation with a baseline level of knowledge to enable meaningful and useful consultation.

Step 2: participants completed a short, pre-workshop online survey on the draft policy implications

Conducted through SmartSurvey, the pre-workshop survey asked participants to:

- Rate the feasibility, desirability and potential effectiveness of each draft Policy Implication on a 3-point scale (very, somewhat, not)
- Provide responses to open-text questions about how each draft Policy Implication could be amended to increase feasibility, desirability and potential effectiveness
- Select the top three draft policy implications they felt should be prioritised by policymakers
- Provide some demographic information about themselves (including their day-to-day role, whether they worked in England and/or Wales and their ethnicity)[7]

The survey was not intended to provide generalisable findings. Rather, survey responses were analysed by the RAND Europe team ahead of the consultation workshops to guide the focus of workshop discussions and identify priority issues.

Step 3: participants attended two online workshops with embedded surveys to discuss findings and test, validate and refine the policy implications further

Each of the two workshops lasted two hours and involved:

- Presentation of aggregated and anonymised results of the pre-workshop survey by the RAND Europe study team
- Facilitated participant discussion on the draft policy implications, focusing on areas where participants' pre-workshop survey responses indicated differences of opinion and ways in which the suggestions for change could be improved. Each workshop focussed on three draft policy implications
- Revision of the wording of the draft policy implications based on workshop discussions
- Completion of a short in-workshop survey which asked participants to re-rate the feasibility, desirability and potential effectiveness of each revised Policy Implication and to order the policy implications in order of priority. This used the Mentimeter survey platform, enabling the generation and display of anonymous, aggregated, real-time results to all participants

[7] These questions were optional and were included to support our understanding of the demographics of Delphi participants, in line with the YEF's mission.

Findings from the workshop discussions and surveys were used to refine the final wording of our policy implications and to provide an indication of how feasible, desirable and potentially effective education stakeholders thought they were. Data from the surveys are included in Annex 1.

Analysis

All data from the literature review, interviews and Delphi were recorded using bespoke templates and analysed thematically using a bespoke coding framework. Interview data were coded with MAXQDA. Deductive codes were used to organise data into categories aligning with research questions, while inductive coding enabled bottom-up identification of findings. The final coding framework is provided in Annex 2.

Our research was grounded in an ecological, anti-racist theoretical framework. Ecological approaches recognise that both current practice and the ability to make changes in practice are informed by enablers and barriers at multiple levels:

- Macro-level (policy and economic context and wider operating environment)
- Meso-level (educational institutions, local services)
- Micro-level (individuals)

This provided a framework for understanding not only how children's involvement in violence is affected by education practice but also how education practice is affected by policy and other factors. It facilitated integrated analysis to explore current practice, common drivers of and barriers to better practice (at the micro, meso and macro levels), and the system and policy changes needed to improve practice.

We used a critical interpretive synthesis methodology (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006) to develop overall findings and suggestions for policy and system change. Given the breadth and complexity of topics explored in this study, this methodology was particularly well suited to our purposes for the following reasons:

- Critical interpretive synthesis is iterative in nature, meaning we were able to allow findings from the concurrent literature review and interviews to inform foci explored through each method. New issues raised by interviewees were validated and augmented through the literature review, while practices and challenges identified through the literature review were followed up in interviews to develop rich findings.
- Critical interpretive synthesis enables triangulation and the synthesis of primary and secondary data as well as quantitative and qualitative data. This allowed us, when answering our research questions, to make full use of the range of evidence gathered through our various methods.

- Critical interpretive synthesis enables reflexivity and the consideration of different perspectives, which prompts analytical sensitivity to diversity and equity. This was particularly important and useful, given the focus of the report on issues of equity and inclusion within the education system.

Limitations

In line with our critical interpretive synthesis methodology, our **literature review** used theoretical sampling, which allowed us to identify and include a large range of relevant information from different sources, including policy documents, academic literature and grey literature. As a result, the literature review is subject to the usual limitations of non-systematic literature reviews: results are not replicable, and, as search strategies were not exhaustive, it is possible that some relevant literature was not included.

Similarly, the **interviews** conducted with 50 stakeholders were conducted using purposive sampling and were not intended to be representative of the education profession or education policy stakeholders. We did not collect data on interviewees' demographic characteristics, such as age, gender or ethnicity. While we achieved our target samples for the different stakeholder groups and felt that data saturation was reached, there may be additional perspectives on our research questions among education stakeholders, which were not captured in our dataset.

As our interview sample is not intended to be representative of wider populations, we report prevalent themes arising from the interviews without attributing findings to a specific number or proportion of interviewees. The exception to this is Chapter 3: our analysis organises the challenges most commonly discussed by our interviewees into 13 categories and specifies the total number of interviewees who discussed concerns falling within each overall category.

Finally, the **Delphi consultation** has several methodological limitations that are common to Delphi methods. These limitations include having a small sample, which means the discussions and results are highly dependent on the expertise, insights and perspectives of participants. Engaging education leaders and policy stakeholders allowed us to identify and work to reconcile differences of view on promising policies. Participants brought a range of modes of experience and expertise, providing valuable insights to inform our suggestions to support violence prevention in the education system. If repeated with another group of participants, however, the Delphi consultation could gather different views on the changes suggested in this report.

Scope of this report

This report focuses on state-funded education for children in England and Wales. In England, this includes primary schools (for children aged 5-11), secondary schools (for children aged 11-16) and further education, such as sixth forms and colleges (for children aged 16-19). In

Wales, this includes primary schools (for children aged 3/4-10), secondary schools (for children aged 11-16/18) and middle schools (for children aged 3/4-16/18). In England, young people must stay in education or training until the age of 18, while in Wales, there is no requirement to continue education or training beyond the age of 16.

In England, state-funded schools include local authority (LA)-maintained schools, which are funded by the central government through the local education authority, **and academies**, which are funded directly by the DfE through the Education Funding Agency. Many, but not all, academy schools are part of multi-academy trusts (MATs), which are not-for-profit companies that run more than one academy. DfE figures from 2021 show that 63% of primary schools were LA-maintained, 34% were part of a MAT and 3% were single academy trust (SAT) schools (DfE, 2022b). Almost four-fifths of secondary schools were academies, however, with 22% being LA-maintained, 59% being part of a MAT and 19% being SATs (Ibid.). **State-funded schools in Wales are maintained by LAs; there are no academy schools.**

The state-funded system also includes education provision for children who are unable to attend mainstream schools for some or all of their education (for example, following an exclusion from school).

In England, this encompasses special schools, which provide education and support to pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan, and AP, which includes LA-maintained AP schools, PRUs and AP academies.[8] Statutory guidance on AP in England sets out that AP includes education arranged by LAs for children who, because of permanent exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for children temporarily suspended from school; and off-site provision where schools direct children to improve their behaviours (DfE, 2023a). In 2021, 59% of special and AP schools in England were LA-maintained, 36% were part of a MAT and 5% were SATs (DfE, 2022b).

In Wales, children unable to attend mainstream schools may attend special schools if they have additional learning needs (ALN) or receive education other than at school (EOTAS), often in LA-maintained PRUs. PRUs in Wales are established by LAs, who have 'a duty to provide suitable education for children and young people who, by reason of illness, [permanent or temporary] exclusion or otherwise, may not receive such education in a mainstream school' (Welsh Government, 2018b).

[8] In England, PRUs that convert to academy status become AP academies. Beyond state-funded AP (and therefore outside the scope of this report), the AP system in England also encompasses independent, registered AP schools and further education settings and independent, unregistered AP (which includes one-to-one tuition and work-based placements). The total number of unregistered providers, one-to-one tutors and work-based placements is not recorded by the government (IntegratED, 2023).

Structure of this report

This report is organised into four chapters, followed by a summary of conclusions and suggestions for policy and system change.

Chapter 1 sets out descriptive summaries of the main elements of key policies that significantly influence the practice schools can implement to keep children in education, provide trusted adults and develop children's social and emotional skills.

Chapter 2 provides an analysis of existing statistics on trends and disproportionalities in attendance, suspensions, exclusions and AP cohorts. It also sets out brief findings from our interviews and literature review on practice currently being delivered in education settings in relation to keeping children in education, providing trusted adults and developing children's social and emotional skills. It includes spotlights on practice highlighting promising approaches in line with the YEF practice guidance.

Chapter 3 sets out in-depth findings from our interviews and literature review on the challenges and barriers preventing more education settings from delivering effective, equitable practice to prevent violence.

Chapter 4 discusses a set of five specific policy and system changes that, our evidence suggests, would help ensure more education settings are able to deliver good practice to prevent violence. The discussion includes the rationale for each suggested change and considerations for implementation.

Note on terminology

To note, for the sake of brevity throughout this report and to reflect the language used by the YEF, we use the term 'exclusions' to refer to exclusions/permanent exclusions and 'suspensions' to refer to suspensions/fixed-term exclusions unless discussing the situation in England and Wales separately, in which case we use the preferred terms in each country.

1. The policy context of practice in education settings to reduce children's involvement in violence

1.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the first of our research questions:

- **What is the policy and funding context of practice within education settings to prevent children's involvement in violence?**

Findings are drawn from our literature review, which included reviewing key policies, statutory and non-statutory guidance, curricula, inspection frameworks, funding formulae and other literature and evidence.

The policy context in which education settings operate profoundly influences – by enabling, constraining and shaping – the content and quality of practice education settings are able to deliver. A critical discussion of the ways in which this context affects practice, how it influences the challenges faced in delivering good practice to prevent violence and what policy changes might help more settings to deliver good practice is presented in subsequent chapters. The more descriptive findings we present here are thus intended to lay the foundations for that discussion.

This chapter provides descriptive summaries of the following 11 aspects of education policy in England and Wales (as of November 2024), which significantly influence the practices that schools can implement to keep children in education, provide trusted adults and develop children's social and emotional skills:

- **The school funding system:** this is a crucial enabler of the practices that schools are able to deliver.
- **School performance measures:** what schools are measured on directly affects their priorities and practices.
- **School inspection:** similarly, what schools are inspected on has a significant influence on priorities and practices.
- **Curricular requirements:** these set out what schools are expected to teach and the knowledge and skills pupils are expected to develop.
- **Relationships and sex education (RSE):** this has a particularly important role in teaching pupils about violence and healthy relationships, so we set out the requirements for this area of the curriculum in more detail.
- **Safeguarding policy:** this establishes standards and duties for keeping children safe from violence and harm, including peer violence.

- **Teaching and leadership training and development:** these materially influence workforce knowledge and skills, including skills for preventing children's involvement in violence.

- **Attendance**: schools are subject to specific requirements regarding pupil attendance that shape their strategies and practices to keep children in education, including how they promote attendance and address absence and persistent absence from school.

- **Suspensions, exclusions and removing pupils from the roll:** a significant body of policy regulates how schools can, and cannot, remove children from classrooms and school premises. Different policies govern practice around official and unofficial exclusions/permanent exclusions and suspensions/fixed-term exclusions, outlining specific practices that are unlawful.

- **AP and PRUs:** while not all excluded or suspended pupils are placed in AP or PRUs, and not all pupils in these settings have been excluded or suspended, these settings provide critical support to pupils at risk of missing out on education.

- **Children missing education:** schools and LAs are subject to statutory guidance on identifying children who are missing out on their entitlement to education and supporting their re-engagement with education.

1.2. School funding

Funding is an enabler of practice at the most fundamental levels, enabling staff salaries to be paid, educational materials and school resources to be bought, and enrichment programmes and support interventions to be procured and delivered. When interviewees were asked which aspects of education policy and systems influence what schools can do to prevent violence, funding was the most commonly cited factor.

In England, the government allocates money each year for all state-funded schools via the Dedicated Schools Grant. This is divided into four notional blocks: for schools, for early years, for high needs and for LA's statutory duties around schools (DfE, 2017).

Both LA-maintained and academy schools in England receive funding through the school notional block. The amount of funding received is determined by the National Funding Formula. This formula takes into account factors including the number of pupils a school has; its location; and the levels of deprivation, prior attainment, mobility and English as an additional language (DfE, 2024b).

The DfE also provides schools with extra funding to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This funding is known as Pupil Premium and is available for each pupil who has been registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the last six years. Pupil Premium is not a budget for individual pupils, and schools do not have to spend

Pupil Premium solely to benefit pupils who meet the funding criteria. Pupil Premium funding can, therefore, be used to support other pupils with identified needs, as well as for whole-class interventions. In the academic year 2023/2024, the Pupil Premium was £1,455 for primary-age pupils and £1,035 for secondary-age pupils. Schools also received £2,530 for each pupil who had left LA care through adoption, a special guardianship order, a child arrangements order or a residence order (DfE, 2024j). Pupil Premium funding is paid to education settings in quarterly instalments. A setting's Pupil Premium allocation is calculated from the information it submits in the October school census.

Children identified as having special educational needs (SEN) or other high needs are eligible for additional per-pupil funding. This comes in two forms: through the notional SEN budget within the school's block of funding and through the high needs block of funding.

Schools are expected to spend up to £6,000 per pupil from their budget on providing additional support for children with SEN (the notional SEN budget). LAs are responsible for identifying what the notional SEN budget for mainstream schools in their local area should be each year by using the national funding formula factors to determine what is appropriate for their area and following guidance provided by the DfE. For example, LAs are advised to take into account the proportion of deprivation and those with low prior attainment locally, as these are proxies for SEN. LAs must then inform mainstream schools about the notional SEN budget that they should spend, which must be no more than £6,000 per child. The notional SEN budget does not represent a separate stream of funding; rather, it acts as guidance for mainstream schools in determining how much of their overall budget should be spent on supporting children with additional SEN. If a child is identified as having higher needs and provided with an EHC plan and a placement in a mainstream school, the notional SEN budget must be used to contribute the first £6,000 of additional support needed (Education and Skills Funding Agency [ESFA], 2024a). In using this £6,000 funding, schools must follow the SEND Code of Practice to ensure that the support received is appropriate and meets the child's needs (DfE and Department of Health, 2025).

For pupils with EHC plans or who attend AP, high-needs block funding is used to fund their education and support. The funding is allocated by the ESFA to each LA each year. The ESFA uses a high-needs funding formula to determine how much funding each LA gets based on previous spend and proxy factors that include population levels of disability, bad health, low attainment, deprivation, FSM and AP. The LA then uses this funding to support children with high needs (ESFA, 2024b). This funding takes two main forms:

- Core funding for special and AP schools: this provides funding for school places for children in special schools and AP schools when this is arranged by the LA. This funding represents £10,000 per pupil and is provided at the beginning of the year to the school. This funding matches the per-pupil funding and the notional SEN funding that pupils in mainstream schools receive from the school block (ESFA, 2024b).

- Top-up funding for individual pupils with high needs: this is funding that is required to support pupils over and above the core funding. This is allocated by LAs to schools for specific pupils, and each LA determines how much is received, with no national standardisation. The DfE encourages LAs to use bands, which are published, to encourage transparency, but this is not compulsory. Funding is received for each pupil when they join a school or at the beginning of the school year (Ibid.).

Mainstream schools – rather than the LA – fund the AP places of pupils who remain on their roll (ESFA, 2024b).

The DfE also provides school capital funding, which is designated to help maintain and improve the condition of school buildings and grounds for all state-funded schools in England. LA-maintained and academy schools can access this funding through either school condition allocations and/or the condition improvement fund, which involves a bidding process.

In Wales, maintained schools and EOTAS settings, including PRUs, are funded by LAs, which receive the majority of their total funding through the Welsh government's annual local government budget, known as the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), and raise the remainder locally through council tax. The Welsh government does not, therefore, provide funding directly to schools but via local government in the form of the RSG. The RSG is not ring-fenced, meaning that the funding allocated to each authority is available to be spent as the authority sees fit (Welsh Government, 2018a).

The Welsh government itself receives funding grants from the UK government. The largest of these is the annual block grant. This is calculated using the Barnett formula, which sets devolved budgets by using the previous year's budget as a starting point and then adjusting it based on increases or decreases in comparable spending per person in England (UK Parliament, 2024).

Individual LAs set budgets for the services they provide, including budgets for their schools, which are determined by local funding formulas and vary across LAs (Stats Wales, 2023). Regulations on school funding in Wales require 70 per cent of funding for individual schools' budgets to be distributed in accordance with factors which are learner led (HM Government, 2010). Authorities can use discretion in distributing the remaining 30 per cent on the basis of a range of factors, taking into account the circumstances of individual schools.

PRUs can also receive funding from mainstream schools. As in England, support for a pupil in a mainstream school can be directly commissioned by that school from a PRU to form part of the pupil's main education.

The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is also made available by the Welsh government to improve outcomes for learners eligible for FSM and children who are looked after by the LA. The PDG is paid directly to LAs in Wales and then distributed to schools. For 2024/2025, the PDG is available to schools at a rate of £1,150 per child. Guidance states that 'schools and

settings are expected to use the PDG funding for "whole-school or setting approaches". These approaches can benefit all of their children and young people. However, they must specifically support the needs of eligible learners in light of the disadvantage they face' (Welsh Government, 2024a). PDG also provides funding for PRUs and EOTAS, with LAs required either to engage with settings providing these services or to organise the provision of such services within their local areas.

Budgets dedicated to SEN and additional learning needs (ALN) services and education are determined by LAs. Across LAs in Wales, there is significant variation in SEN/ALN funding amounts per pupil, the criteria LAs use to identify pupils with SEN/ALN and how LAs provide educational services to students (Stats Wales, 2024a). Services can be funded through delegated budgets within mainstream schools and colleges, through delegated budgets within special schools for children with SEN/ALN or by the LA directly using retained funds.

Of the total SEN/ALN provision that is budgeted by LAs for the 2024/2025 financial year, 29% is delegated to special schools, 42% is delegated to notional allocations within mainstream schools and colleges, and a further 29% is non-delegated funds held centrally by LAs. How much mainstream schools and colleges can spend on SEN/ALN 'forms part of the formula for distributing funds to schools for each LA', but 'these are, however, notional, and it is for each school to determine how much of its delegated budget to spend on SEN/ALN' (Ibid.).

1.3. Accountability through school performance measures

What is measured and scrutinised (almost inevitably) tends to be prioritised. Interviewees discussed how the systems through which schools are held to account for their performance have a profound influence on what schools prioritise in their budgets and the practices they deliver. Accordingly, the extent to which schools prioritise and deliver practices to prevent violence is significantly affected by school performance measures.

The DfE measures school performance in England across a range of indicators

The department collates information on schools' **Ofsted ratings, academic attainment and progress, absences, pupil population, workforce population and finances**, publishing this online on an annual basis (DfE, NDb). The public can use this database to search for specific primary, secondary and special needs schools or colleges of interest; download the relevant results; and compare their performance.

A range of headline performance indicators record pupil performance and progress at three stages of education: Key Stage (KS) 2, KS4 and 16-18 education (DfE, 2016). In 2016, two headline indicators – Progress 8 and Attainment 8 – were introduced at the secondary school level, with a specified intention to shift the focus away from exam results and towards student progress and subject variety (DfE, 2015).

Attainment 8 measures pupils' attainment across eight qualifications: maths (double weighted), English (double weighted, if both English language and English literature are sat); three qualifications from the English Baccalaureate (Baccalaureate subjects are English, maths, science, history, geography and languages); and three further qualifications that can be either General Certificates of Secondary Education or technical awards (DfE, 2024c). Pupils' individual Attainment 8 scores are not publicly available but are, instead, used to calculate schools' average Attainment 8 scores as well as pupils' and schools' Progress 8 scores.

Progress 8 'aims to capture the progress that pupils in a school make from the end of primary school to the end of KS4' (DfE, 2024c). Progress 8 compares a student's Attainment 8 score with those Attainment 8 scores of students who had similar assessment results to them at KS2. Pupils' Progress 8 scores come together to produce an average that is then interpreted as the extent to which a secondary school has helped pupils progress since KS2. A positive score means pupils made more progress, on average, than pupils across England who got similar results at the end of KS2, a score of zero reflects the national average and a negative score means pupils made less progress than their counterparts (Ibid.).

Disruptions to assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic, including exam cancellations, affected Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores for certain year groups, as there were no data available to collect.

The Welsh government also collects and makes a range of performance data on schools publicly available online.

School-level, local-level and national-level performance data are published online by the Welsh government (for school-level data, see Welsh government, ND; for local-level and national-level data, see Stats Wales, ND). The Welsh government groups indicators according to specific categories: **pupils, resources, attainment, benchmarking, attendance and physical education and sport** (Welsh government, ND). Either all or some of these results, along with other information (including Estyn reports), are provided for all nursery, primary, middle, secondary and special schools in Wales.

In Wales, disruptions relating to the pandemic led the Minister for Education and Welsh Language to halt the government's usual arrangements for KS4 qualifications data reporting (Welsh government, 2020a). The suspension is still in place, but schools have been required since the academic year 2022/2023 to report on a set of interim measures of KS4 qualifications. While the government does make this information publicly available, it advises that it should be used for self-evaluation and improvement decisions but not in isolation to judge or compare schools. In the meantime, the **Welsh government plans to develop 'a more holistic information ecosystem** that promotes learning and puts learners, teachers and parents at the centre' (Ibid.).

In addition to school-level literacy, numeracy, science and Welsh Baccalaureate scores, published outcomes include the **(interim) Capped 9 Points Score, measuring schools' pupil performance at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)**. According to guidance, 'the Capped Points Score is a performance measure calculating the average of the score for each individual learner in the cohort, capped at a specified volume of GCSEs or equivalent qualifications' (Welsh government, 2019a). The Capped 9 measure takes into account a pupil's best results from three subject-specific slots – the literacy slot (i.e. the best result from GCSE English or Welsh language or literature), the numeracy slot (best GCSE maths result) and the science slot (best GCSE result in a science subject) – and six other non-subject-specific slots (best result from any six other GCSEs or approved qualifications).

School performance measures published in Wales do not include any specific measures of how well secondary schools have helped to progress pupils' academic attainment.

1.4. Accountability through inspection

Alongside published performance measures, school inspections are a key element of the system for holding schools accountable. The inspectorates in England and Wales were described by interviewees as exerting significant influence on how schools set their priorities and the practices they deliver, including practices to prevent violence.

Ofsted is the schools inspectorate in England responsible for inspecting and reporting on settings that provide education for young people, including schools, colleges and AP. Ofsted is a non-ministerial department of the UK government that is accountable directly to parliament. It inspects all state-funded schools in England and around half of independent schools.

On 3 September 2024, **Ofsted announced a series of planned changes** in response to its Big Listen public consultation. These include stopping the use of single-word overall effectiveness judgements (effective immediately), introducing School Report Cards that cover all areas that Ofsted inspects (from September 2025); consulting on developing a new Inspection Framework that drives higher standards and reduces anxiety for providers; consulting on the possible introduction of a new inspection criterion related to the inclusion of vulnerable pupils; introducing new annual reviews of safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling to consider how schools are helping to keep children safe; calling for the regulation of unregistered AP; and launching an Ofsted Academy to share best practices from Ofsted inspections (Ofsted, 2024a).

The Inspection Framework currently in use was introduced in September 2019 and last updated in 2023. Under this framework, Ofsted makes judgements on four areas of an education setting: 1) quality of education, 2) behaviour and attitudes, 3) personal development and 4) leadership and management. To allow for comparability, the framework applies to all state-funded schools, including AP schools (Ofsted, 2023). According to Ofsted,

personal development was separated from behaviour and attitudes in the inspection framework in 2019 in order to acknowledge the importance of 'pupils' wider personal development and their opportunities to grow as active, healthy and engaged citizens' (Ofsted, 2018). Under behaviour and attitudes, the framework includes the assessment of the extent to which learners have high attendance, 'relationships among learners and staff reflect a positive and respectful culture', and the school creates 'an environment where bullying, learner-on-learner abuse or discrimination are not tolerated'. Under personal development, the framework includes the assessment of the extent to which 'the curriculum and the provider's wider work support learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy'. The Inspection Framework does not, however, include any explicit mention of violence, provision of trusted adults or the development of social and emotional skills (Ofsted, 2023).

Prior to the recently announced changes, Ofsted issued single-word overall effectiveness judgements to schools, using a 4-point grading scale: 1) outstanding, 2) good, 3) requires improvement and 4) inadequate. When any school was judged inadequate, it was placed in a category of concern by Ofsted. As part of this process, when an LA-maintained school was judged as inadequate, the Secretary of State for Education issued an academy order, and the school became an academy sponsored by an organisation or an individual approved by the DfE to support an underperforming academy or group of academies. When an academy was judged inadequate, it was monitored by Ofsted and often re-brokered to a new MAT to become a new sponsored academy (Ofsted, 2019b).

Most schools currently receive one day's notice of an Ofsted inspection, though Ofsted's consultation response notes that the inspectorate will 'consult with the sector to make sure that our notice periods and the size of our inspection teams are proportionate to the size and complexity of the providers we inspect' (Ofsted, 2024a).

In 2023, Ofsted launched a joint framework for inspecting provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), along with the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This framework sets out how inspections will now evaluate how LAs commission and oversee AP, given the large number of children and young people with SEND in this kind of provision (Ofsted and CQC, 2024a). Under this framework, inspections cover all SEND, including SEN support, those children and young people in AP, as well as those with EHC plans in LA-maintained schools and academies.

Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales, which is responsible for inspecting and reporting on settings providing education for young people in Wales, including schools, colleges and AP. It is independent from but funded by the Welsh government. Estyn inspects independent schools as well as state-funded schools.

Estyn's inspection framework was updated in September 2024 and focuses on three areas: 1) teaching and learning, 2) wellbeing, care, support and guidance and 3) leading and improving. The framework includes (among others) an assessment of how well schools promote pupils' attendance at school, support positive behaviour (including among those with a history of exclusion), support pupils' personal and social development, including their understanding of the characteristics of healthy relationships, and develop pupils' 'social and emotional skills to prepare them for later life' (Estyn, 2024).

As of 2022, Estyn no longer issues summative one-word judgements of schools or PRUs but instead uses a report card intended to detail how well an education provider is helping children to learn.

With this new framework, the notice period for Estyn inspections has been reduced from 15 to 10 working days.

1.5. National curricula

Curricular requirements placed on schools were raised by almost half of our interviewees as affecting the extent to which schools are able to prioritise and deliver practices to reduce children's involvement in violence and, particularly, teaching practice that helps develop social and emotional skills.

The **national curriculum for England provides the statutory standards for school subjects, lesson content and attainment levels for all LA-maintained primary and secondary schools.** The national curriculum for England requires every state-funded school to offer a broad and balanced curriculum which 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society' and 'prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life' (DfE, 2014).

The curriculum is organised into blocks of years called KSs (ranging from early years to KS4), at the end of which teachers formally assess a child's performance.

Academies and AP schools (including LA-maintained AP schools) are not required to follow the national curriculum for England. Academies must, however, teach a broad and balanced curriculum, including English, maths, science, RSE and religious education (HM Government, ND). AP schools are required to provide an alternative curriculum that meets learners' needs.

The most recent national curriculum for England was introduced in 2014. In July 2024, the government announced a new **Curriculum and Assessment Review**. This review, which will publish recommendations in 2025, aims to 'ensure that the curriculum balances ambition, relevance, flexibility and inclusivity for all children and young people' (DfE, 2024d). Among the outcomes it aims to deliver are a broader curriculum so pupils can access music, art, sport, drama and vocational subjects; a curriculum that builds the knowledge, skills and attributes children and young people need to thrive and embeds digital, oracy and life skills in their

learning; and a curriculum that 'reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented' (Ibid.).

The Curriculum for Wales is currently being introduced across all schools in Wales for pupils aged three to 16 years. The curriculum rollout began in 2022 and requires every school in Wales to design, adopt and implement its own curriculum suitable for its learners (Welsh government, 2022b). It is based on four purposes that focus on the breadth of academic, wellbeing and social benefits learners can gain by attending school. These purposes are that a school's curriculum is to support its learners to become 1) ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives, 2) enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work, 3) ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world and 4) healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Hwb, 2022).

In line with the Welsh government's (2022c) Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, first published in 2022, the Curriculum for Wales requires all learning areas to reflect the diverse experiences and contributions of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and individuals in past and present Wales. Mandatory teaching of Black and Brown histories in Wales became a statutory requirement of the Curriculum for Wales in 2023.

One of the changes brought in by the new Curriculum for Wales is the replacement of KSs with progression steps. Progression steps are part of the descriptions of learning, which describe how learning should progress, broadly corresponding to expectations at ages five, eight, 11, 14 and 16 (Hwb, 2022).

The Curriculum for Wales has been designed to be 'inclusive of all learners' and applies to PRUs and other EOTAS settings (Ibid.).

1.6. Relationships and sex/sexuality education

A smaller number of interviewees discussed how RSE holds a particularly important role in teaching pupils about violence and harm in relationships, as well as how to have healthy and safe relationships. Given its centrality in addressing pupils' vulnerability to violence, we set out further detail on this aspect of the curriculum below.

RSE is a part of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education within the national curriculum for England (DfE, 2019a). A legal requirement for RSE to be taught in all schools in England came into force in 2020. Relationship education is compulsory for all primary and secondary school pupils. Primary schools can choose to teach sex education, but it is not compulsory, and parents can withdraw their children from sex education in primary school. Sex education is compulsory for all children in secondary schools. **Parents can ask to withdraw their children from parts or all of sex education taught as part of RSE** but cannot withdraw their children from sex education taught in science. These duties relate to both mainstream schools and AP.

The statutory guidance on RSE requires schools to 'be alive to issues such as everyday sexism, misogyny, homophobia and gender stereotypes and take positive action to build a culture where these are not tolerated, and any occurrences are identified and tackled' (Ibid.). Through RSE, primary pupils are expected to develop 'the knowledge they need to recognise and to report abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse' (DfE, 2021). For secondary students, statutory guidance on RSE states that pupils may need 'support to recognise when relationships (including family relationships) are unhealthy or abusive (including the unacceptability of neglect, emotional, sexual and physical abuse and violence, including honour-based violence and forced marriage) and strategies to manage this or access support for oneself or others at risk' and should learn 'what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable' (DfE, 2019a).

Key aspects of the guidance include that all schools must have a written policy for relationships education and/or RSE which takes account of pupils' needs and the communities they serve. Notably, the guidance includes specific requirements to provide parents with 'every opportunity to understand the purpose and content of Relationships Education and RSE', noting that 'good communication and opportunities for parents to understand and ask questions about the school's approach help increase confidence in the curriculum' (Ibid.).

In 2023, the government announced a review of RSE statutory guidance. In May 2024, the **DfE published a draft revised guidance on RSE and health education**, which proposed changes including the introduction of age limits on the teaching of some issues (for example, it proposes that no sex education be taught before Year 5) and prohibiting teaching about the concept of gender identity (DfE, 2024l). The draft guidance also emphasises the right of parents to see materials used in teaching. A consultation on the revised guidance was open until July 2024. At the time of writing, the government has not yet published a response.

In Wales, relationships and sexuality education is part of the new curriculum, and schools have a statutory duty to teach this subject (Welsh government, 2021). The aim of relationships and sexuality education in Wales is to make sure all children and young people have opportunities to develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality to help empower children and young people with the understanding and skills they need to make informed choices and be happy, healthy and safe. Unlike in England, **parents in Wales do not have the right to withdraw their children from relationships and sexuality education**.

In Wales, the Relationships and Sexuality Education Code sets out the three key strands of learning that must be encompassed in RSE: relationships and identity, sexual health and wellbeing, and empowerment, safety and respect. With regard to violence, the Code states that learners must be supported in 'recognising harmful, abusive or coercive behaviour in personal relationships including control, violence and sexual violence and how to respond and seek help for self and others', and develop 'awareness of laws in place to protect from different forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect and harassment' (Welsh government, 2021).

As with other aspects of Curriculum for Wales, there is a requirement for schools to involve learners, parents, carers, partner agencies and the local community in the design of the RSE curriculum. In relation to RSE in particular, statutory guidance states that 'schools and settings should have clear lines of communication in relation to RSE and should engage with learners, parents, carers and the wider community, offering them the opportunity to engage with learning and teaching in RSE' (Hwb, 2024). It notes that 'a proactive approach should help to dispel any concerns that parents and carers may have in relation to RSE provision' (Ibid.).

1.7. Safeguarding

Keeping children safe from involvement in violence is an important element of safeguarding. While safeguarding legislation in England and Wales does not place specific duties on education settings to keep children in education, provide trusted adults and develop social and emotional skills, it does require schools to identify risks of and protect children from extra-familial harm and violence.

'Keeping Children Safe in Education' is the statutory guidance for schools and colleges in England that sets out the legal duties they must follow to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people under the age of 18 in their settings (DfE, 2024i). The guidance states that 'all staff should be aware of the indicators, which may signal children are at risk from, or are involved with, serious violent crime' and lists indicators, such as increased absence, a change in friendships, unexplained injuries and unexplained gifts or possessions, among others (Ibid.). The guidance also contains a specific section setting out how schools should respond to 'all signs, reports and concerns of child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment, including those that have happened outside of the school or college premises, and/or online'. It specifies what staff must do if they have concerns about a child and places particular duties upon education settings' Designated Safeguarding Leads. The guidance requires all staff, but especially Designated Safeguarding Leads and Deputy Leads, to consider whether children are at risk of extra-familial harm, including serious youth violence. In other statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (DfE, 2023a), schools are described as pivotal to safeguarding (though, unlike LAs, chief officers of police and integrated care boards, schools are not statutory safeguarding partners). This guidance on multi-agency working also highlights the need to protect children from extra-familial harm, including in peer groups and community or public spaces.

'Keeping Learners Safe' provides safeguarding guidance to schools in Wales. It sets out what Senior Leaders and Designated Safeguarding Persons must do to keep children and young people safe. Requirements include that 'all education settings must: reduce risks, take the right actions to keep children safe, follow the law, follow all national and local policies, guidance and procedures, have their own policies and procedures, know about safeguarding needs in their area' (Welsh government, 2020b). This requires all staff working in education

settings to 'understand and recognise the risks of peer-on-peer abuse and harmful sexual behaviour' but does not explicitly mention youth violence (Welsh government, 2022a).

Ofsted and Estyn are responsible for inspecting safeguarding in schools in England and Wales, respectively.

1.8. Teaching and leadership training and development

Training and ongoing development requirements and standards for school teachers and leaders materially influence the knowledge and skills of the school workforce. As such, the extent to which school staff can develop the knowledge and skills they need to help prevent children's involvement in violence (including by keeping children in education, providing trusted relationships, and supporting the development of social and emotional skills) is affected in part by the training and development opportunities they can access.

In England, qualified teacher status (QTS) is required to teach in state-funded schools other than academies. To achieve QTS, candidates must meet a range of entry requirements (relating to GCSE and degree attainment) before participating in undergraduate or graduate initial teacher training (ITT; DfE, NDc).

The content of **ITT is expected to adhere to the ITT core content framework** (DfE, 2019b). This high-level framework does not set out a full ITT curriculum; instead, individual training providers are responsible for designing appropriate curricula tailored to their learners' needs, which, therefore, vary across different providers. The ITT core content framework was designed to ensure providers focus on enabling trainees to develop their practice in five core areas: behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours. These are organised in line with the DfE Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011), which are used to assess trainees on their way to achieving QTS (DfE, 2019b). The core content framework also aims to ensure trainee teachers are supported in developing the skills required to teach and support pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have SEND or mental health needs. ITT providers are also expected to offer behaviour management training (as suggested by the Carter Review of ITT [Crown copyright, 2015]) and subject-specific training to trainees (DfE, 2019b). Trainees must be made aware of their statutory duties regarding safeguarding and equalities legislation (Ibid.). At induction, all school and college staff are expected to take part in safeguarding and (online) child protection training (DfE, 2024i). It is also expected that this training will be regularly updated and that staff will be informed about any updates within this space (Ibid.).

Following ITT, the Early Career Framework (DfE, 2019c) offers early career teachers up to two years of professional development 'designed to help enhance their practice, knowledge, and working habits' (Ofsted, 2024b). National professional qualifications (NPQs) are also on offer for teachers at all levels 'to develop their expertise in specialist areas of teaching or leadership' (Ibid.). Specialist NPQs help improve classroom teaching, while leadership NPQs

focus more on the development of leadership skills for Senior Leaders and Headteachers (DfE, 2020).

Teacher training in Wales follows a similar approach to that in England. QTS is also required to be able to teach in state-funded schools in Wales (Welsh government, 2016). To achieve QTS, candidates must first meet minimum entry requirements (again relating to GCSE and degree attainment) before participating in undergraduate or graduate initial teacher education (ITE).

ITE is delivered through partnerships between universities and schools, which 'work together to provide the professional education and development of student teachers' (Ibid.). This **ITE is expected to adhere to five professional standards formulated by the Welsh government** for teaching, leadership and assisting teaching. These standards concern pedagogy, leadership, professional learning, collaboration and innovation (Hwb, 2017). Similarly to the DfE's Teachers' Standards, these professional standards are used to assess trainees and newly qualified teachers on their way to achieving QTS (Education Wales, 2018). In Wales, it is required that all teachers, staff and volunteers within the school environment participate in safeguarding training every two years (Welsh Government, 2020b). Schools and colleges in Wales are expected to ensure that student teachers are safe to work with children and that they are aware of the relevant safeguarding policies (Ibid.)

Career-long professional learning on offer to teachers at all levels is also expected to adhere to the five professional standards (Hwb, ND). A set of nationally recognised learning programmes deliver career-long training in teaching, leadership, headship, and diversity and anti-racist professional learning, among others.

1.9. Attendance

Keeping children in education is crucial to preventing violence. Practice in education settings to keep children in education happens within the context of a substantial body of statutory and non-statutory guidance on attendance, suspensions/fixed-term exclusions, permanent exclusions and school moves. Schools are required to promote attendance, though policy allows schools significant discretion in selecting approaches to managing this.

1.9.1. General requirements

The law in England and Wales entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude and any SEN they may have. Statistics on attendance are officially recorded and published in both England and Wales.

There is no statutory minimum level of attendance in either England or Wales. Traditionally, good attendance is taken to be around 95% (Education Wales, 2023). For statistical analyses, a pupil in England is identified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10% or more of their possible sessions (DfE, 2024e). In Wales, the definition of persistent absence was changed

from missing 20% to missing 10% of half-day school sessions in October 2023 (Education Wales, 2023).

Parents/carers have a legal responsibility to make sure their child receives an education by attendance at a school, by EOTAS, or by elective home education. Where children are registered at a school, parents/carers have an additional duty to ensure that their child attends school regularly, i.e. 'every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school' (DfE, 2024g). Although school attendance is the duty of parents/carers, government guidance for both England and Wales states that pupil attendance is a shared responsibility.

1.9.2. Improving attendance

In England, DfE statutory guidance states that 'all schools have a continuing responsibility to proactively manage and improve attendance across their school community' (Ibid.). As per the latest statutory guidance, in order to manage and improve attendance, schools in England are expected to 1) build strong relationships and work jointly with families, listening to and understanding barriers to attendance and working in partnership with families to remove them, 2) develop and maintain a whole-school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance, 3) have a clear school attendance policy, which all leaders, staff, pupils and parents understand, 4) accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence, 5) regularly analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place, 6) share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, LAs and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe and 7) be particularly mindful of pupils who are absent from school due to mental or physical ill health or their SEN and/or disabilities and provide them with additional support (Ibid.).

Recent changes to attendance policy included that **all schools in England are now required to consider issuing fines to parents/carers when a pupil has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling 10-week period**; from August 2024, the fine for school absences across the country will be £80 if paid within 21 days or £160 if paid within 28 days (DfE, 2024h).

Welsh non-statutory guidance outlines in detail the well-established links between attendance and attainment, wellbeing and citizenship. The guidance states that 'the advantages of education are such that **the right to a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities is one of the seven core aims of the Welsh Government** based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' (Education Wales, 2023). It also outlines a set of principles and approaches for improving learner engagement and attendance. These are 1) a person/learner-centred approach based on the rights of the child, 2) a strengths-

based approach, 3) an adverse childhood experiences–aware and trauma-informed approach, 4) a focus on learner wellbeing and mental health, 5) a whole-school, whole-system approach, 6) building positive relationships, culture and ethos, 7) family engagement and multi-agency support and 8) prevention (to help stop barriers to engagement from arising) and the adoption of sustainable ways of working (Education Wales, 2023). The guidance sets out that 'successful schools understand that building learner engagement and improving attendance is a continuous process that begins with developing trusting relationships between adults and learners' and suggests that attendance strategies should be developed in consultation with learners and in a way that recognises that parents and all school staff have a role to play in improving learner engagement and attendance (Ibid.).

Welsh guidance aiming to bring attendance back to pre-pandemic levels suggests that one way to do this is through schools building positive and trusting relationships with children and their families (Education Wales, 2023). The guidance states that schools that are successful in improving attendance understand that this is 'a continuous process that begins with developing trusting relationships between school staff and learners' and have staff who all understand 'that every interaction and engagement has an impact on learners' sense of worth', which can influence their sense of belonging and engagement in school and, thus, their school attendance (Ibid.).

In Wales, penalty notices issued to the parent(s)/carer(s) of children of compulsory school age who are registered at a maintained school or a PRU are described in guidance as 'one option among a number of different interventions available to promote better school attendance' (Welsh Government, 2013). **There is no requirement for schools in Wales to consider issuing fines for non-attendance**, and the guidance notes that 'penalty notices will be most effective when issued for less entrenched attendance issues' (Ibid.).

1.9.3. Recognition in policy of intersectional inequity in attendance

Guidance on attendance in both England and Wales recognises that attendance rates are patterned according to a range of characteristics, which schools should be aware of.

The statutory guidance in England notes that schools should pay particular attention to the attendance of pupil cohorts that 'have historically had poor attendance or that face entrenched barriers to attendance', noting that this should be specific to the school's context but 'may include pupils who have a social worker, are from a background or ethnicity where attendance has historically been low, have a long-term medical condition, SEN or a disability, or are eligible for free school meals' (DfE, 2024g).

Relatedly, the T Code in England is a specific code used to authorise certain school absences for children from Traveller families. If a family is travelling for work purposes and lets the school know, schools can put a 'T' in the register to record Gypsy and Traveller pupils' agreed absences from school (The Traveller Movement, ND).

Welsh guidance on attendance cites a number of factors that may be associated with a higher risk of absence from school, including living in poverty; having been previously excluded; having ALN; identifying as coming from an ethnic minority community or Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community; having English or Welsh as an additional language; being a child who is looked after or on the child protection register; and being an asylum-seeking child, a refugee child or a child of migrant workers. Because a greater risk of absence from school can exacerbate the challenges that some children already face, **the guidance states that 'promoting good attendance is, therefore, particularly important in these cases'** (Education Wales, 2023).

With regard to racial disparities, Welsh guidance states that school absence before and during the COVID-19 pandemic was highest among Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and that 'attendance amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners is generally lower than their peers' (Education Wales, 2023). The unique position of Traveller families in relation to school attendance is recognised by Section 444(6) of the Education Act 1996. It provides a defence to conviction if the parent can demonstrate that 1) they are engaged in a trade or business that requires travel, 2) the child has attended a school as regularly as the nature of the trade or business permits and/or 3) if the child is over six years old, they have made at least 200 attendances (i.e. sessions or half days) over the last year (Ibid.).

1.10. Suspensions, exclusions and removal of pupils from roll

How and when schools can and cannot remove children from classrooms and school premises and from the school roll is regulated by a significant body of statutory and non-statutory guidance. Below, we set out the key policies governing official – and the various forms of unofficial – suspensions, exclusions and moves out of schools.

1.10.1. Suspensions/fixed-term exclusions

Suspensions, or fixed-term exclusions, are when a pupil is not allowed to attend (or is excluded from) a school for a set period of time. Suspensions is the preferred term used in England, and fixed-term exclusions is the preferred term used in Wales. These practices have also previously been referred to as fixed-period exclusions. Statistics on suspensions/fixed-term exclusions are (as with statistics on attendance) officially recorded and published in both England and Wales. The most commonly recorded reason for suspensions in England and fixed-term exclusions in Wales is persistent disruptive behaviour.

According to the DfE, **in England, suspensions are considered 'an essential behaviour management tool** that should be set out within a school's behaviour policy' (DfE, 2024f). The guidance states that suspensions can be used 'to provide a clear signal of what is unacceptable behaviour as part of the school's behaviour policy and show a pupil that their current behaviour is putting them at risk of permanent exclusion', but that if a pupil is regularly suspended 'headteachers and schools should consider whether suspension alone is an

effective sanction for the pupil and whether additional strategies need to be put in place to address behaviour' (Ibid.).

Separate, non-statutory guidance in England aiming to provide advice to schools on behaviour includes a list of suggested interventions that can prevent the recurrence of misbehaviour. This list includes providing mentoring and coaching to pupils and engaging with local partners and agencies to address specific challenges, such as difficulties with social skills, peer relationships, resilience or anger management (DfE, 2024a).

Welsh government guidance states that fixed-term exclusions should only be used 'in response to serious breaches of the school's behaviour policy and if allowing the learner to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the learner or others in the school' (Education Wales, 2019b). The guidance notes that any exclusion (either fixed-term or permanent) should be used only after a school has exhausted all other available strategies and 'should normally be used as a last resort' (Ibid.).

This guidance also states that before deciding whether to exclude a learner, either permanently or for a fixed term, Headteachers should 1) ensure that an appropriate investigation has been carried out, 2) consider all the evidence available to support the allegations, 3) take account of the school's behaviour and equal opportunities policies and, where applicable, the Equality Act 2010, 4) allow the learner to give his or her version of events, 5) check whether the incident may have been provoked, e.g. by bullying or by racial or sexual harassment, 6) if necessary, consult others but not anyone who may later have a role in reviewing the Headteacher's decision and 7) keep a written record of the incident and actions taken (Education Wales, 2019b). Welsh guidance also lists examples of where fixed-term and permanent exclusions would not be appropriate (e.g. school uniform breaches and lateness or truancy) and lists alternatives to exclusions, such as pastoral support programmes, restorative justice, internal exclusion and managed moves (Ibid.).

In both England and Wales, suspensions/fixed-term exclusions can be for whole days or part of the school day (e.g. lunchtimes) and do not have to be for a continuous period. Any time a pupil is sent home due to disciplinary reasons and asked to work online should always be recorded as a suspension. A pupil can experience a suspension/fixed-term exclusion for one or more periods up to a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year, and suspensions cannot be converted into a permanent exclusion (DfE, 2024f; Education Wales, 2019b). For all suspensions, Headteachers have a duty to formally record these periods and to notify a child's parent(s)/carer(s) in writing (DfE, 2024f; Education Wales, 2019b).

In both England and Wales, pupils who are suspended or excluded from school for a fixed term must still receive their education. Government guidance in England states that 'headteachers should take steps to ensure that work is set and marked for pupils during the first five school days of a suspension', suggesting this may include online resources (DfE,

2024f). If a suspension is longer than five school days, the school must arrange suitable full-time education from the sixth school day, for example at an AP school (DfE, 2013).

Welsh government guidance states that a school must work with the LA and other relevant agencies to ensure that work is set and marked during the full period of a fixed-term exclusion (Education Wales, 2019b) and that policies for receiving learners back into school after a fixed-term exclusion should include receipt of work completed during the exclusion (Welsh Government, 2023a). In Wales, LAs are responsible for providing EOTAS services to meet the needs of pupils who cannot attend a mainstream or special school, including those who have been permanently excluded.

1.10.2. Exclusions/permanent exclusions

The terms exclusion, used in England, and permanent exclusion, used in Wales, refer to when a pupil is not allowed to attend (or is excluded from) a school and cannot go back to that specific school unless their exclusion is overturned. In both England and Wales, only the Headteacher of a school can permanently exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds (DfE, 2024f; Education Wales, 2019b). Statistics on permanent exclusions are also officially recorded and published in both England and Wales. The most commonly recorded reason for exclusions/permanent exclusions in England is persistent disruptive behaviour, and in Wales, it is physical assault against a pupil.

Guidance in England outlines that the decision to exclude a pupil permanently should only be taken in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others, such as staff or pupils, in the school (DfE, 2024f)**.** The decision to exclude a pupil in England can be based upon behaviour inside or outside school and must be lawful, reasonable, fair and proportionate (Ibid.). The guidance notes that it would be unlawful to exclude a pupil on the grounds that they have a special educational need that the school feels it cannot meet or for reasons such as academic attainment.

With regard to the decision to exclude, the guidance states, 'When establishing the facts in relation to a suspension or permanent exclusion decision, the headteacher must apply the civil standard of proof, i.e. "on the balance of probabilities" it is more likely than not that a fact is true, rather than the criminal standard of "beyond reasonable doubt". This means that the headteacher should accept that something happened if it is more likely that it happened than that it did not happen' (Ibid.). Headteachers must also take the pupil's views into account, considering these in light of their age and understanding, before deciding to exclude, unless it would not be appropriate to do so (Ibid.).

In England, government guidance states that 'schools and local authorities should not adopt a "no exclusion" policy as an end in itself' because such an approach can lead to schools not practising exclusions even when this may be an appropriate way to help ensure that a pupil

remains engaged in education. Instead, the guidance states that '**schools and local authorities should work to create environments where school exclusions are not necessary because pupil behaviour does not require it**' (Ibid.).

When a pupil is excluded from school in England, the school is required to record the main reason for exclusion in the Schools Census, using a choice of predetermined code. The Timpson Review of School Exclusion (Crown copyright, 2019) recommended that the DfE change the choice of exclusion codes to better reflect the range of reasons for exclusion. In response to this recommendation, exclusion codes in the Schools Census were updated in 2020. Schools were instructed to cease the use of 'other' as a reason for exclusion, and five new codes were introduced: 'use or threat of use of an offensive weapon or prohibited item', 'abuse against sexual orientation and gender identity (for example, LGBT+)', 'abuse relating to disability', 'inappropriate use of social media or online technology' and 'wilful and repeated transgression of protective measures in place to protect public health' (IntegratED, 2023). These new codes are currently in use alongside 'physical assault against pupil', 'physical assault against adult', 'verbal abuse / threatening behaviour against pupil', 'verbal abuse / threatening behaviour against adult, 'bullying', 'racist abuse', 'sexual misconduct', 'drug and alcohol related', 'damage to property', 'theft' and 'persistent or general disruptive behaviour'.

As with fixed-term exclusions, **Welsh government guidance states that permanent exclusions should not be used lightly.** The guidance states that before deciding whether to exclude a learner, a Headteacher should take the same steps as for a fixed-term exclusion (Education Wales, 2019b). The examples of where exclusions would not be appropriate and the list of alternatives to exclusion apply equally to fixed-term and permanent exclusions (Ibid.).

Following any fixed-term or permanent exclusion, schools and PRUs in Wales are required to inform their LAs of the reasons for the exclusion using one or more of the following codes: 'physical assault against a pupil', 'physical assault against an adult', 'persistent disruptive behaviour', 'bullying', 'racist abuse', 'sexual misconduct', 'verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against a pupil', 'verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against an adult', 'theft', 'damage', 'drug and alcohol related' and 'other' (Education Wales, 2024).

Researchers have suggested that the approach to school exclusions in Wales is often viewed as reflective of Wales' commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which foregrounds a rights-based agenda positing that behaviours leading to exclusion arise from circumstances outside of the child's control (Power and Taylor, 2024). As noted above, the CRC is explicitly mentioned in Welsh education guidance as providing a foundation for education policy (e.g. Education Wales, 2023).

As with suspensions/fixed-term exclusions, pupils who are permanently excluded from school in England and Wales must still receive their education. Where a pupil is permanently

excluded, they may be educated in AP settings directly following their exclusion and may return to mainstream schooling after a period of time (DfE, 2024f; Education Wales, 2019b).

1.10.3. Internal exclusions

Internal exclusion is when a pupil is excluded for disciplinary reasons but remains within the school site. Often, this practice involves a child being removed from class and moved to a separate room or booth within the school. Schools can adopt a policy which allows pupils to be removed from class or placed in an area away from other pupils for a limited period. This practice is sometimes referred to as informal or unofficial exclusion or (when a child is separated from other pupils) seclusion or isolation. There is a lack of officially recorded national data in England or Wales on the numbers of internal exclusions.

DfE advice for Headteachers and school staff on behaviour in schools states that, in England, children can be removed from class for the following reasons: 1) to maintain the safety of all pupils and to restore stability following an unreasonably high level of disruption, 2) to enable disruptive pupils to be taken to a place where education can be continued in a managed environment and 3) to allow the pupil to regain calm in a safe space (DfE, 2024a).

Relatedly, a pupil support unit is a planned intervention named in education guidance for England that can be provided or used by a school a) as a planned intervention for behavioural or pastoral reasons or b) as a final preventative measure to support pupils at risk of exclusion (DfE, 2024a). Government advice in England states that the underlying ambition of a pupil support unit 'should be to improve behaviour and maintain learning with the goal to successfully reintegrate pupils into mainstream lessons' and that 'the approach in the unit should be aligned to the culture of the whole school and compatible with the school's behaviour policy' (Ibid.). Most pupil support units are established solely to accommodate pupils from the school in which they are located (Ibid.).

Guidance in Wales states that internal exclusion 'can be used to diffuse situations that occur in school that require a learner to be removed from class but may not require exclusion from the school premises'. Pupils can be removed to a designated area within the school, with appropriate support, or temporarily moved to another class (Education Wales, 2019b).

1.10.4. Informal exclusions

The terms informal exclusion and unofficial exclusion are also used to describe instances where children are sent off school sites without being officially suspended or excluded. Sending a pupil home due to their behaviour is unlawful when it does not follow the formal school exclusion process (DfE, 2024f; Education Wales, 2019b).

1.10.5. Off-rolling

Off-rolling does not have an agreed-upon or legal definition, but, according to Ofsted, it is 'the **practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil**' (Ofsted, 2019a). Similarly, Estyn defines off-rolling as a situation 'where a school removes a pupil from its school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion' (Estyn, 2019). Although off-rolling is not clearly defined and is an unlawful practice in both England and Wales, there is widespread acknowledgement that it does occur (IntegratED, 2023). Pupils who experience off-rolling may be moved from one school to another (without a lawful managed move) or may end up out of the education system completely.

Both Ofsted and Estyn have worked to identify instances of off-rolling by examining pupil data and speaking to school leaders and teachers during inspections in recent years. For example, in England, Ofsted tracks schools with exceptional levels of pupil movement. For a school to be identified as having exceptional levels of pupil movement, a minimum of five pupils and 5% of pupils must have moved between Years 10 and 11; the number of moves must be significantly high and the school must have met both of these criteria for two consecutive years (Ofsted, 2022). Education settings that are found to have off-rolled pupils are likely to be judged inadequate for leadership and management by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2019a). In Wales, Estyn was commissioned by the Welsh Government Education Directorate to investigate the prevalence and impact of schools off-rolling pupils (Estyn, 2019). The resulting report outlined three recommendations for the Welsh government to reduce the practice of off-rolling in Wales, two of which were accepted (Education Wales, 2019a). These recommendations were to review the registration of pupils who move to EOTAS and consider using destination data to measure the effectiveness of EOTAS provision, and to work with LAs to set up databases of compulsory-age pupils in their area (Ibid.).

1.10.6. Managed moves

Managed moves are voluntary agreements between two schools and the parent(s)/carer(s) of a pupil. When conducted in accordance with guidance, these agreements are lawful in both England and Wales. **Managed moves result in a pupil being permanently removed from the roll of one mainstream school and joining another and may be used as an alternative to exclusion, where appropriate**. Unlike figures on attendance, suspensions/fixed-term exclusions and permanent exclusions, there are no officially recorded and published data available on the number of managed moves in either England or Wales.

For England, DfE guidance states that managed moves are among the behavioural strategies that can be used to improve a pupil's behaviour to help prevent a suspension or permanent exclusion. This guidance states that managed moves 'should only occur when it is in the pupil's best interests' and that alternative measures, such as off-site direction, should be used

if a temporary move is needed to improve a pupil's behaviour (DfE, 2024f). It also notes that managed moves should be preceded by information sharing between the original school and the new school, including risk assessment and advice on effective risk management strategies, and states that it is 'important for the new school to ensure that the pupil is provided with an effective integration strategy' (Ibid.).

In England, in response to recommendations in the Timpson review of school exclusion (Crown Copywrite, 2019), the DfE launched a call for evidence to help assess the way in which schools were using managed moves and then updated guidance on suspensions and exclusions to include some guidance on managed moves (DfE, 2022a). This guidance was fairly limited (at three paragraphs), and while recent updates (DfE, 2024f) included some additional information, there remains a lack of a comprehensive, detailed protocol to support schools in practising effective managed moves. Analysis by the Education Policy Institute (2024a) found **significant variation between LAs in England with regard to the approach to overseeing managed moves**. One in five LAs did not have a fair access protocol setting out the process for managed moves.

For Wales, **Welsh government information states that 'a managed move should be considered as a possible support mechanism before reaching crisis point and as such should be offered as one of the many support strategies and interventions available for the pupil'** and that 'for a managed move to be successful, the full engagement of the pupil, parents/carers and the schools need to be fully considered' (Welsh government, 2011). The Welsh Government has also outlined best practice in relation to managed moves for schools and parents. This includes 1) establishing the core reasons for the problems being experienced and/or the behaviours being displayed by the pupil and, thus, whether a managed move is the most appropriate action for each pupil, 2) considering whether the benefits of the move outweigh any disadvantages of the inevitable disruption to the pupil of adapting to a new environment and new arrangements and making new friends, 3) avoiding thinking of a managed move or presenting a managed move to a parent as the only alternative to exclusion and 4) carefully considering the timing of a managed move, as well as a pupil's transport and access needs following the move (Ibid.).

In a report on managed moves in Wales, Estyn (2018) highlights **the variability in their use and effectiveness** due, in part, to the lack of a comprehensive, nationally agreed protocol ensuring that all pupils, regardless of where they live, have similar experiences of planned school moves. The report notes that since information on managed moves for LAs, schools and pupil referral units was published in 2011, it has been 'subject to misinterpretation and very different practices' (Estyn, 2018). It also notes that managed moves do not provide pupils with the same legal protection as those permanently excluded from school (Ibid.). For example, pupils undergoing a managed move are not automatically entitled to interim education provision, the right of appeal or support with practical arrangements, such as transport. For this reason, Estyn argues it is important that schools and LAs work together

with pupils and their families to ensure that managed moves are used as an early intervention strategy. To enable this practice, **Estyn called in the report for clearer, more up-to-date guidance for LAs, schools and PRUs on the use of managed moves**.

1.11. Alternative provision and pupil referral units

AP and PRU settings play a particularly important role in protecting pupils from violence, including by keeping them engaged with education. While not all children who are excluded go to AP and PRUs and not all children in AP and PRUs have been excluded, cohorts attending AP and PRUs have, on average, demonstrably higher needs (such as SEN) than their counterparts in mainstream schools and are considerably more likely to have had experiences (such as suspensions and exclusions) that are associated with higher vulnerability to becoming involved in violence.

We have set out, throughout this chapter, how the policies above apply to state-funded AP in England and PRUs in Wales. To summarise, funding comes to AP schools in England through a range of sources: mainstream schools (when the school itself arranges AP for a pupil who remains on its roll), LAs and central government. In Wales, EOTAS provisions, including PRUs, can also be arranged and funded by schools or LAs. State-funded AP schools in England and PRUs in Wales are inspected by Ofsted and Estyn, respectively, and are subject to the same inspection frameworks as mainstream schools. AP schools in England are not required to follow the national curriculum but must provide an alternative curriculum that meets learners' needs. In Wales, the new Curriculum for Wales was designed with the intention that it would be accessible to all and applies to PRUs and other EOTAS settings. Policies on safeguarding, attendance, suspension, exclusion and removal of pupils from rolls also apply across these settings.

Across both England and Wales, however, governments have recognised the need for improvement in AP and EOTAS systems. The Timpson review of school exclusion (Crown copyright, 2019) found that the education received in AP schools in England was not sufficient, with AP lacking the support and funding needed for specialist staff and the facilities they need. More recently, Ofsted and the CQC published a thematic review of AP in local areas in England in 2024. This review found 'a lack of national standards and a lack of clarity on responsibilities for AP commissioning and oversight', leading to inconsistent practice in and with AP (Ofsted and CQC, 2024b). The review specifically highlighted that 'agencies do not strategically collaborate with each other' regarding decisions on placing and supporting children in AP (Ibid.). Similarly, the Welsh government has acknowledged a need for national policies and procedures to address inconsistencies in the quality of PRUs (Welsh government, 2019b).

In this context, HM Government has announced its intention to reform how high-needs funding and provision works in England. The SEND and AP improvement plan, published in 2023 (DfE, 2023b), sets out government plans to change the SEND and AP systems in England.

Plans include additional funding to deliver a national system that is co-produced with families, children and young people and accompanied by national standards that set expectations for identifying and meeting needs and clarify who is responsible for delivering provision and from which budgets. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduced in 2024 may also have implications for the AP system (though, at the time of writing, this Bill is yet to pass through all parliamentary stages).

In Wales, the EOTAS Framework for Action sets out key recommendations to improve EOTAS (Welsh government, 2019b). These recommendations include conducting a programme of research to understand best practice and how to achieve good outcomes in EOTAS, establishing local EOTAS panels and developing a more comprehensive range of non-statutory guidance and catalogues of best practice to support LAs in improving provision.

1.12. Children missing education

While, as discussed above, the law in England and Wales entitles every child of compulsory school age to a full-time education, some children in both countries are neither in any form of schooling nor educated other than at school. This increases their vulnerability to violence and other negative outcomes. Policies on children missing education set out what schools and LAs can and should do to identify these children and support their re-engagement with education.

In England, **statutory guidance on children missing education requires LAs and schools to make reasonable enquiries to identify children** of compulsory school age in their areas who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable EOTAS (DfE, 2024t). It notes that LAs should have robust policies and procedures in place to enable them to meet their duties in relation to these children and regularly review them to ensure they are fit for purpose. This includes ensuring there are effective tracking and enquiry systems in place and appointing named people to receive referrals about children who are missing education. The guidance also summarises the other duties and powers LAs hold, which they can use to support their response to children missing education. These include serving notice on parents requiring them to satisfy the LA that the child is receiving suitable education, issuing School Attendance Orders and prosecuting parents who do not comply, prosecuting or issuing penalty notices to parents who do not ensure their school-registered children attend school regularly, and applying to court for an Education Supervision Order to support a child to attend school. The guidance notes that schools may upload information about pupils who have left their school but have an unknown destination to the School to school database, but it does not require schools to upload this information.

The DfE does not gather national child-level data on children missing education, although, since 2022, it has collected voluntary data from LAs to inform estimates of the number of children missing education. An investigation into children missing education by the Office of the Children's Commissioner found, however, that 'many local authorities were not confident

in their estimated figures of children missing education' and some were not able to provide an estimate (Children's Commissioner, 2024a). A further report by the Children's Commissioner for England notes that estimating the true number of children missing education is made difficult due to inconsistencies in definitions and recording at the LA level (Children's Commissioner, 2024b). To address the lack of robust estimates of children missing education, the government currently plans, through its Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, to introduce legislation requiring all councils to maintain a register of children who are not in school (DfE, 2025).

Similarly to England, **statutory guidance in Wales places a duty on LAs to identify children and young people not receiving an education** (Welsh government, 2017). The guidance states that the 'purpose of the duty is to make sure that children and young people missing from education are identified quickly and that effective monitoring systems are put in place to ensure that the child or young person is found and action is taken to provide them with "suitable education", which may also involve support arrangements'. The guidance provides advice and recommendations for how to meet this duty and is intended as a practical toolkit. Recommended approaches include having a named person who is to be notified when a child is identified as not receiving a suitable education and ensuring that the child engages with appropriate education provision and support as quickly as possible. The guidance states that schools should make a record in the School to school database when pupils leave school without a destination and reasonable efforts to locate them have been unsuccessful. It also details a range of approaches that LAs can take to prevent and address the risk of children missing education. This includes identifying and providing tailored support to children recognised as being at greater risk of missing education, following up on admission applications that do not result in a school place and issuing School Attendance Orders if needed.

As in England, **there are currently no national statistics on children missing education in Wales**. The Welsh government has, however, consulted on and plans to pilot draft regulations that would place a requirement on LAs to develop a database of children who are potentially missing education in their areas (Welsh government, 2024f). In both England and Wales, plans to introduce national statistics on how many children are missing out on their entitlement to education aim to enable the identification of the scale of the problem and appropriate strategies to address it.

1.13. Conclusion

This chapter described the key aspects of education policy in England and Wales that most influence the practices education settings are able to deliver to reduce children's involvement in violence, including what they can do to keep children in education, provide trusted adults and develop social and emotional skills.

We examined the overarching funding and accountability systems that pay for, measure and inspect schools and, thereby, exert significant influence on how schools set priorities for practice delivery.

Additionally, we highlighted policies that govern what school staff must do to safeguard children from violence and harm and policies on school staff training that shape the knowledge and skills they bring to their practice.

We also described curricular policies, including policies on RSE, that directly relate to how schools support children in developing the social and emotional skills that help bolster resilience to violence.

Finally, much of the policy we presented shapes what schools do to keep children in education, setting out requirements and guidance on managing attendance, suspensions/fixed-term exclusions, permanent exclusions, the removal of pupils from school rolls, provision for children in AP and PRUs, and children missing education.

The remaining chapters of this report present a more critical discussion of the ways in which this context shapes and constrains practice, how it influences the challenges faced in delivering good practice to prevent violence and what policy changes might help more settings to deliver good practice.

2. Current practice in education settings to reduce children's involvement in violence

2.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the second and third of our research questions:

- **What is <u>current practice</u> within education settings regarding violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults and developing children's social and emotional skills)?**
- **What examples are there of current practice in education settings that show <u>potential promise</u> for violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults and developing children's social and emotional skills)?**

Findings on practice are drawn from interviews and the literature review, including analysis of statistics on trends in attendance, suspensions, exclusions and AP cohorts.

We begin by setting out findings on what education settings are doing to keep children in education, exploring, in turn, practice relevant to the goals of improving attendance, reducing the need for suspension and exclusions (including a range of approaches schools take to official and unofficial suspensions and exclusions) and providing support for excluded children and children in AP and PRU settings. We then set out findings on strategies employed in schools to provide children with trusted adults and develop their social and emotional skills.

Throughout the chapter, we provide spotlights on practice, highlighting examples of current practices that show potential promise in keeping children in education, providing trusted adults and developing social and emotional skills.

This chapter is not intended to provide a comprehensive map of all relevant practices nor to provide a robust assessment of the prevalence or effectiveness of the various practices in use. Rather, the objective is to provide a sense of the different kinds of practices that schools are currently delivering and some examples of practices that show potential promise in helping to prevent violence.

2.2. Improving attendance

2.2.1. In England and Wales, rates of absence from school have risen since before the Covid-19 pandemic

The DfE publishes statistics on pupil attendance at and absence from school in England. The latest full academic year for which data are available is 2022/23. These statistics show that **in**

England, rates of absence have risen in all types of schools since the Covid-19 pandemic, despite the range of practices schools deliver to promote attendance. The rate of absence in secondary schools increased from 5.5% in 2018/19 to 9.0% in 2022/23 (DfE, 2024m). In AP schools, the absence rate increased from 35.3% in 2018/19 to 41.7% in 2022/23 (Ibid.).

Analysis by FFT Education Datalab (FFT) using data collected from 10,000 schools shows that, although there has been some improvement in the 2023/24 academic year, absence remains above pre-pandemic levels (FFT, 2024a). These data also reveal changing patterns of absence. For example, rates of unauthorised absence have more than doubled in secondary schools since the pandemic and do not appear to have improved in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23. A higher proportion of children are also missing more school: in 2018/19, 64% of secondary-aged pupils missed no more than 5% of school sessions. In 2022/23, this figure had fallen to 46%.

As absence rates have increased, rates of persistent absence (absence from 10% or more of sessions) have also risen.[9] DfE statistics show that 26.5% of pupils on roll at secondary schools were persistently absent in 2022/23, compared to 13.7% in 2018/19 (DfE, 2024m).

Rates of persistent absence are patterned by a variety of characteristics. The DfE data show that older pupils are more likely to be persistently absent: rates of persistent absence in 2022/23 increased for every year group from Year 6 to Year 11 (Ibid.). A similar trend is observed for severe absence (absence from 50% or more of sessions), with almost 5% of pupils in Year 11 being severely absent from school (Ibid.). Among pupils in secondary schools, 44% of disadvantaged pupils and 39% of pupils with SEN were persistently absent in 2022/23 (Ibid.).[10] Regarding ethnicity, the highest persistent absence rates across primary and secondary schools in 2022/23 were among pupils of Irish Traveller heritage (72%) and Gypsy or Roma heritage (64.9%) (DfE, 2024s). The lowest rates were among pupils of Chinese heritage (6.1%) and Black African heritage (11.5%) (Ibid.).

The Welsh government also publishes statistics on pupil attendance at and absence from school. **Significant rises in absence have also been seen in Wales since the Covid-19 pandemic.** While the percentage of half-day sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence in secondary schools stood at around 6% in 2018/19, this rose to over 12% in 2022/23 (Stats Wales, 2024b). Recent figures for the academic year 2023/34 show that the average proportion of sessions attended among secondary school pupil, was 85.5% (Welsh government, 2024b).

[9] There are two sessions per school day (morning and afternoon registration).

[10] Therse are not mutually exclusive groups.

Those eligible for FSM had lower levels of attendance than ineligible pupils, with 77.7% of sessions attended compared to 87.8% for ineligible pupils (Ibid.).

Persistent absence, using the previous definition of absence from 20% or more of sessions, has also risen since the pandemic.[11] Welsh government data show that 16.3% of pupils aged 11-15 were persistently absent in 2022/23, three times higher than pre-pandemic levels (Ibid.). For pupils eligible for FSM, this rate was more than twice as high at 35.7% (Ibid.). Persistent absence rates, **using the current definition of persistent absence (absence from 10% or more of sessions), have slightly decreased**, however. A total of 31.9% of pupils were persistently absent in 2023/24, slightly down from 32.5% over the same period in the 2022/23 academic year (Ibid.).

2.2.2. Practices to support attendance vary considerably within and across both countries

The clearest finding from our review of current practice to support attendance across England and Wales is that it is highly variable. **Schools are implementing a range of different practices and approaches, with very little consistency** across schools.

In 2023, the YEF commissioned a survey from Teacher Tapp to explore the extent to which interventions related to violence reduction are being delivered in schools across England and shared results with the study team.[12] The survey asked about types of practices to improve pupil attendance in schools. It found that schools in England are delivering a **range of practices to improve pupils' attendance, with little consistency across schools**. Of the practices that 9,625 teachers were asked about, the most common were found to be holding meetings with parents/carers of absent children at 73% of respondents and sending text messages and letters to parents/carers at 70%. Almost half of respondents said their schools also gave rewards for high attendance (46%) and delivered breakfast clubs (39%) to incentivise attendance. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the DfE introduced new attendance thresholds for intervention in March 2024, requiring schools to consider issuing fines to parents/guardians when a pupil has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling 10-week period. The Teacher Tapp survey found that 36% of respondents said their school had issued such fines.[13] Almost a third of Teacher Tapp respondents said their schools employed attendance officers (32%), while over one-fifth noted their schools provided transport to pick children up from their homes if they were not attending school (22%).

[11] Persistent absence is now defined in Wales as missing 10% or more sessions.

[12] The full results of this survey are not published.

[13] FFT Education Datalab estimates that, had the thresholds been in place for the 2022/23 year, the parents/guardians of around 20% of pupils in Years 8 to 11 would have been at risk of a fine.

Eighteen per cent of respondents noted that their schools provide 'exciting in-school activities' to encourage pupils to attend.

Each of these practices was also raised in our interviews with professionals working in and around the education sector. Discussing strategies to encourage school attendance, interviewees highlighted the importance of **open communication with parents/carers**. Having a dedicated family liaison/support worker at the school was described as a particularly effective approach.

Figure 4: Spotlight on practice: dedicated family liaison and support roles

Many of our interviewees who work in mainstream schools, AP settings and PRUs highlighted the particular value of professionals in their schools who work to liaise with and support the families of pupils who have or are at risk of low attendance or engagement in school.

Family liaison and support roles often work with a range of vulnerable pupils, giving priority to those who need the most help to engage with school, such as those experiencing multiple disadvantages.

These professionals aim to promote school attendance and engagement by working in partnership with pupils' parents, carers and families, developing and delivering tailored plans to ensure pupils have full access to educational opportunities.

This may involve building relationships with families over time through phone calls, drop-in sessions at school and/or home visits; developing an understanding of families' particular situations; and providing tailored support to overcome barriers to learning and participation.

Family liaison and support roles can signpost families to support provided by the school or externally, for example, advising on how to register for FSM or encouraging attendance at breakfast clubs.

They may also liaise with other staff in the school to communicate families' needs, coordinate support and make or support referrals to external support services.

Interviewees noted that the benefit of these dedicated roles includes that they provide the capacity and skills to engage and work collaboratively with families, enabling other school staff to focus on meeting children's needs in school.

An important consideration for the effectiveness of these roles, however, is how they are supported by schools' senior leadership teams (SLTs). Interviewees noted that while family liaison and support workers can build an in-depth understanding of the challenges and barriers faced by families in ensuring their children engage in their education, their ability

to provide effective support to meet those challenges is strongly enabled or hindered by senior leadership responses.

An evidence review by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) found evidence that parental engagement interventions that involve parents in supporting and encouraging their children to attend school have a small positive impact (EEF, 2022). The EEF and YEF are co-funding further evaluation to build the evidence base on whether and how the use of Attendance and Family Liaison Officers may be an effective school-level strategy to improve attendance (EEF, 2024).

Interviewees also described the **provision of an enriched curriculum**, including woodland or outdoor activities, in terms of an attempt to make schooling interesting, relevant and enjoyable to pupils and, thus, to motivate high attendance.

It was notable, however, how **many strategies for improving attendance were designed to address barriers stemming directly from the poverty and deprivation** faced by their pupils' families. Interviewees highlighted that, in the context of rising food poverty, the **provision of food** to pupils and families was a key part of their approach to encouraging attendance and engagement in school. In addition to breakfast clubs, interviewees described providing other free or subsidised meals for pupils unregistered for FSM funded out of school budgets; food banks, which one interviewee noted was used not only by pupils' families but also by school staff; and, at one school, a subsidised cafe one morning a week to encourage parents to come in, '*have the dignity of buying themselves a coffee that they can afford'* and interact with school staff. Other provisions to tackle poverty-related barriers to pupil attendance described by our interviewees included **uniform banks** so pupils can access the clothes they require for school, **transport** to enable pupils to get to and from school safely, and **warm hubs**, where families can stay after dropping their children off at school to get warm and have a hot drink.

In the following chapter, we explore the difficulties schools can face in encouraging attendance in cases where pupils' parents or carers do not place a high value on schooling or carry educational trauma from their own experiences at school. The provision described above not only helps to overcome poverty-related barriers but also offers a route to counteracting family-level attitudinal barriers by encouraging parents and carers to view and value the school as a place of support and safety.

Some of our interviewees noted that **fines** were a part of the toolkit they used to support attendance but also acknowledged a number of risks attached to this approach, including the potential to cause material harm to families experiencing poverty and deprivation and to harden attitudes towards the school. Whether or not fines are effective as a short-term measure to improve attendance (and our review did not find any robust evidence on this), there was a view among interviewees that developing trusting relationships between families and schools (through which schools can communicate the importance of school attendance, identify families' individual circumstances and the specific barriers to attendance faced by

their child, and provide support to overcome those barriers) was a more effective strategy in the long term.

Figure 5: Spotlight on practice: Cheshire West Traveller Schools Forum

The Cheshire West Traveller Schools Forum is a free, termly, online meeting for maintained schools in Cheshire West LA. It was designed with the aim of enabling schools to share learning on good practice to support the education of children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The forum is hosted and organised by the LA's Traveller Education lead, and all schools that are known to have Traveller pupils on roll are invited to join. In an interview with a professional involved in the forum, we were told that two primary schools serve a high proportion of primary-age Traveller children in the LA and have thus developed expertise in supporting Traveller families. These schools are a source of expertise and support for schools with smaller numbers of Traveller pupils on roll or that are new to having Traveller pupils on roll.

The forum is attended by Head Teachers, teachers, teaching assistants and administrative staff, setting it apart from good practice forums attended only by school leadership. The forum discusses a range of topics with the aim of meeting the needs of attending schools. Three recurring items on the forum's agenda are 1) attendance among Traveller pupils, 2) admissions for Traveller pupils and 3) PSHE education.

Our interviewee noted that, having struggled with girls' attendance on days where PSHE, and sex education in particular, is being taught, schools in the forum shared practices that they found helped to boost the attendance of girls from Traveller communities on these days and their engagement in these lessons. The practices include a member of staff visiting families on Traveller sites in advance of PSHE lessons to detail exactly what content will be taught.

Having identified that attendance often dropped when there were funerals in the Traveller community (due to the need for families to travel to different parts of the country), schools in the forum have also shared that one way in which they have improved attendance has been to develop a dialogue with families during periods of mourning and to generate individual plans that allow children to participate in funerals while taking minimal time off school.

Visiting speakers are invited to some forum meetings. Past speakers have included members of the Traveller community who have shared experiences and insights with the aim of supporting the development of schools' cultural competence and ability to deliver inclusive practice for Traveller children.

While the impact of the Forum has not yet been robustly evaluated, it is highlighted here as an example of a practice designed to be equitable and inclusive and to ensure children

from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are supported to attend and engage fully with school.

2.3. Reducing the need for suspensions and exclusions

2.3.1. In England and Wales, rates of suspension and exclusion from school have risen since before the Covid-19 pandemic, with suspensions in England at an all-time high

The DfE has collected data on exclusions and suspensions in England since 2006/07 as part of the School Census.[14]

Suspensions in England were at their highest recorded level in 2021/22, at a rate of 6.9% (equating to 578,300 suspensions), **and then increased again** to 9.3% (786,961 suspensions), another record high, in 2022/23 (DfE, 2024n). This compares to a pre-pandemic rate of 5.4% (438,265 suspensions) in 2018/19 (Ibid.). Available data for 2023/24 collected by FFT and based on schools' attendance registers suggests that suspensions have continued to increase (FFT, 2024b).

Both suspensions and exclusions are rare within the primary years and are most common among pupils in Year 8 to Year 10. In 2022/23, the suspension rate for state-funded primary schools was 1.81%, compared to 18.90% for secondary schools (DfE, 2024n).

An FFT analysis of repeat suspensions in England found that across the secondary sector, each pupil suspended in 2021/22 was suspended an average of 2.3 times (FFT, 2024c). Over half of compulsory-age pupils (140,000 out of 255,000) who were suspended in the 2021/22 academic year were suspended just once. Of the remainder (who were suspended at least twice), 6,810 pupils were suspended 10 or more times, accounting for 15% of all suspensions. Eighty per cent of pupils aged 11-15 with 10 or more suspensions up to the end of 2021/22 had been identified as having SEN at some point in their school careers, while for pupils with one suspension, that proportion was 42%.

The most commonly recorded reason for suspension in 2022/23 was persistent disruptive behaviour (48% of all reasons given), followed by verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against an adult (16%) and physical assault against a pupil (13%) (DfE, 2024n).[15]

[14] As they are collected two terms in arrears, published statistics lag by an academic year. The most recent data, for the 2022/23 academic year, were published in July 2024.

[15] Prior to 2020/21, a single reason could be recorded for each suspension and permanent exclusion. From 2020/21, up to three reasons could be recorded.

The rate of permanent exclusions in England dipped during the pandemic but now slightly exceeds 2018/19 rates. In 2022/23, the rate of permanent exclusions stood at 0.11% (equating to 9,376 permanent exclusions), compared to a pre-pandemic rate of 0.10% (7,894 exclusions) in 2018/19 (Ibid.).[16]

In 2022/23, the exclusion rate for state-funded primary schools was 0.03%, compared to 0.22% for secondary schools (Ibid.).

Similarly to suspensions, the most commonly recorded reason for exclusion in 2022/23 was persistent disruptive behaviour (39% of all reasons given), followed by physical assault against a pupil (15%) and verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against an adult (12%) (Ibid.).

The Welsh government (2023b) publishes statistics on fixed-term and permanent exclusions from schools in Wales for pupils in maintained primary, middle, secondary and special schools, including those educated other than at school in PRUs.[17]

Fixed-term exclusions have risen in Wales. The rate of fixed-term exclusions in 2021/22 was 98.1 per 1,000 pupils in middle schools, i.e. aged 3-16 (or 9.81%, equating to 2,209 fixed-term exclusions) (Welsh government, 2024c). This compares to a pre-pandemic rate of 86.8 per 1,000 middle school pupils (or 8.68%, equating to 1,533 suspensions) in 2018/19 (Ibid.). As in England, the rate of fixed-term exclusions is higher in secondary schools at 10.54%, compared to primary schools at 1.01% in 2021/22 (Ibid.).

Reasons for fixed-term exclusions/suspensions are similar in Wales and England. The most commonly recorded reason for fixed-term exclusions in 2021/22 was persistent disruptive behaviour (20.3% of all reasons given), followed by verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against an adult (16%) and physical assault against a pupil (17.2%) (Ibid.).

The rate of permanent exclusions is lower in Wales than in England but has risen since the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021/22, the rate was 0.9 per 1,000 pupils in middle schools, i.e. aged 3-16 (or 0.09%, equating to 20 permanent exclusions). This compares to a pre-pandemic rate of 0.7 per 1,000 middle school pupils (or 0.07%, equating to 9 permanent exclusions) in 2018/19 (Ibid.). As in England, the rate of permanent exclusions is higher in secondary school at 0.14%, compared to primary school, which had a rate of 0.00% in 2021/22 (Ibid.).

The most commonly recorded reason for permanent exclusions in 2021/22 was physical assault against a pupil (30.8% of all reasons given), followed by verbal abuse or threatening

[16] The 2022/23 rate remains below the rate in 2006/07. Although the number of permanent exclusions was higher than in 2006/07 (8,658), the pupil population then was not as large. The exclusion rate in 2006/07 would be equivalent to 9,700 exclusions in 2022/23.

[17] The latest full-year data available at the time of writing were for the academic year 2021/22.

behaviour against an adult (12.5%) and then physical assault against an adult and persistent disruptive behaviour (both at 11.1%) (Ibid.).

2.3.2. Rising rates are accompanied by disproportionality in the risk of exclusion for different groups of pupils

In England, being from particular ethnic groups, having SEN, being a child in need or supported by social care, and being eligible for FSM are associated with a higher risk of exclusion.

The Timpson Review of School Exclusion identified a number of factors associated with a higher risk of exclusion in England (DfE, 2019d).

It found that, after controlling for poverty, SEN, absence and other factors, Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils had higher odds of permanent exclusion than White British students. Pupils from Black African and Pakistani ethnic groups were not, on average, excluded at a substantially different rate than White British pupils. While absolute rates of exclusions for Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children are higher than for their White British peers, the review also found that, after applying controls, rates were not substantially higher (though this does serve to demonstrate the multiplicity of factors affecting exclusion rates for these children). Pupils from some ethnic groups, such as Bangladeshi, Indian and Other Asian children, were less likely to be excluded than their White peers.

Similarly, the review explored the relationship between exclusion and SEN, controlling for other factors. Children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (a category of SEN no longer in use) and social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) difficulties were at much greater risk of exclusion. Typically, pupils with SEN with a statement of SEN or EHC plan had lower odds of permanent exclusion than non-SEN children, while SEN pupils without a statement of SEN or EHC plan were more likely to be excluded.

Children in need and those with Child Protection Plans were substantially more likely to be excluded; in-need status was found to be a stronger predictor of exclusion than economic deprivation measures (such as FSM eligibility).

Finally, the review found that children who are eligible for FSM are significantly more likely to be permanently excluded than those who are not when controlling for other differences.

More recently, following a different methodology, FFT identified key risk factors of permanent exclusion as ever having been eligible for FSM, ever having been in need or in care, and having been excluded or suspended in primary school. A total of 8.9% of boys and 8.7% of girls with all three characteristics were permanently excluded.

Over and above these factors, the following characteristics were associated with a greater risk of secondary school exclusion: having Gypsy/Roma heritage, having Black Caribbean or

Mixed/White Black Caribbean ethnicity, being identified with SEMH needs in Year 6, being a persistent absentee in Year 5 or Year 6, first being identified with SEN between the ages of 9 and 11, and attending a school in the North East of England.

Conversely, characteristics associated with a lower risk of exclusion were having an EHC plan in Year 6, being of Indian or Chinese ethnicity, achieving above the expected standard in reading at KS1 (and KS2) and being identified with profound and multiple learning difficulties or multisensory impairment in Year 6.

In Wales, being from particular ethnic groups, having SEN and being eligible for FSM are associated with a higher risk of exclusion.

Government descriptive statistics in Wales suggest that pupils with a Roma ethnic background have the highest rate of fixed-term exclusions for five days or less, and pupils with a White ethnic background have the highest rate of fixed-term exclusions for over five days, while pupils with a Black ethnic background have the highest rate of permanent exclusions (Welsh government, 2024e).

Tseliou et al. (2024a, 2024b) conducted a multivariate analysis of pupils who had ever been excluded – either permanently or for a fixed term – between Year 6 and 11 in Wales. Their analysis of the relationships between ethnicity and exclusions adds some complexity to the picture of disproportionality provided by the government statistics above. Their analysis suggests that, in general, White British pupils are more likely to be excluded than Black or other Asian minority ethnic groups. A detailed analysis of exclusion trajectories also showed that pupils with low levels of exclusion over their educational lifecourse are more likely to be Black pupils than White British pupils. White Traveller ethnic groups were, however, most at risk of exclusion.

The multivariate analysis from Tseliou et al. (2024a, 2024b) also found that, generally, pupils with SEN were more likely to be excluded from school than pupils without SEN but that the disproportionate odds reduced after taking into account their other characteristics. Still, 8.9% of all excluded pupils were found to have behavioural and mental health needs, 32.1% to have cognition and learning needs, and just over half – 50.2% – to have more than one special educational need.

Tseliou et al.'s analysis also found that pupils who had ever been eligible for FSM were more likely than non-eligible pupils to be excluded, while those who had always been eligible for FSM throughout their education were six times more likely to be excluded than non-eligible pupils. Of all excluded pupils in their model, 54.5% had been eligible for FSM for more than one year.

Interestingly, the analysis also examined the association of the language of instruction and location on the likelihood of being excluded. Pupils in Welsh Medium schools were 22% less likely to be excluded than pupils in English Medium schools, while pupils in West Wales and

Southeast Wales were less likely to be excluded from school than pupils in North Wales after controlling for other pupil characteristics.

There were some differences of view among our interviewees about the best way to respond to these inequalities.

Discussing disproportionality in rates of exclusions, interviewees were generally aware of the risk factors for exclusion. Some interviewees urged that commonalities in the experiences of children with certain characteristics warranted the targeting of additional support specifically for those children. Others noted that tailored approaches to understanding individual needs are required to enable more nuanced recognition of the intersectional disadvantages pupils may face and to avoid assumptions about how pupils' experiences may be patterned by their characteristics.

Figure 6: Spotlight on practice: Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales

EYST Wales is a charity working across Wales that aims 'to provide ethnic minority people with the opportunity to reach their fullest potential through holistic, targeted, and culturally sensitive programmes', including in education. EYST runs a number of programmes within and related to education, including sports interventions, youth drop-ins and urban safety projects.

One of their projects, Right to Education, is an all-Wales specialist educational, advocacy and support service targeted at young people aged 11-19 from minoritised ethnicities, although it is also available to primary-aged children. The project was launched in 2023 and provides advocacy and support to young people who are experiencing disputes with their schools, including school exclusions, to help them access their right to education.

To achieve this aim, the project works with pupils, families and schools. For example, Right to Education supports families to appeal exclusion decisions through a case worker, as well as working with schools to explore the appropriateness of changing a permanent exclusion to a fixed-term exclusion.

Schools can also access support directly from EYST when a pupil is considered at risk of exclusion. This support can involve, for example, providing a youth worker to engage with a pupil and identify what support they might need to address the underlying causes of disruptive behaviour. The youth worker will then help them connect with services. For children with undiagnosed SEMH, this could be a mental health professional, while for children who need to develop social skills, it could be a youth club.

EYST also help schools with language support when parents have English as a second language and need support accessing or understanding educational materials. This practice involves helping parents, families and children understand statutory duties relating to school attendance, as well as the guidance governing fixed-term and permanent exclusions,

including the right to appeal. Such support may be particularly useful where families have recently arrived in Wales and/or may not be familiar with the Welsh education system.

While the impact of EYST's work has not yet been robustly evaluated, it is highlighted here as an example of practice designed to promote collaboration between pupils, families and schools with the aim of supporting equitable education outcomes.

2.3.3. Practice to reduce the need for suspensions and exclusions varies considerably within and across England and Wales

Regarding practices aimed at reducing the need for suspensions and exclusions, our research also found a **wide range of practices and little consistency** in the approaches taken by different schools in England and Wales. Further, an important conclusion from much of the research from the Excluded Lives project is that there exists a lack of strong empirical evidence on the benefits and (intended or unintended) impacts of different practices to prevent and manage school exclusions (Excluded Lives, ND).

Reflecting findings from a review of school exclusion practices in Wales recently commissioned by the Welsh government, practices discussed by interviewees ranged from **universal practices** designed to support all pupils to much more **targeted practices** designed to support particular groups or individual pupils based on their needs (Welsh government, 2024d).

Given that the most common reasons for suspensions and exclusions are persistent disruptive behaviour, physical assault and abuse, **most targeted practices aim to support behaviour change**. Approaches taken to achieve this vary considerably across different schools. The Teacher Tapp, commissioned by the YEF to explore violence reduction activities in schools, asked teachers about the practices delivered by their schools to support improved behaviour (and thus, by implication, reduce the need for suspensions and exclusions). The survey found that the most commonly delivered practice was 'mentoring specifically for poorly behaved children', with 42% of respondents saying this happened at their school. This was followed by 'trauma-informed practice training for teachers' (34%), 'sports or outdoor adventure activities for poorly behaved children' (23%) and 'arts activities for poorly behaved children' (13%). One-tenth of respondents (10%) said that 'cognitive behavioural therapy for poorly behaved children' was delivered at their school.

2.3.4. Some schools are working to identify and address the underlying reasons behind children's disruptive and violent behaviours

When interviewees were asked about activities delivered in schools to reduce the need for suspensions and exclusions, they described similar practices to those explored in the Teacher Tapp survey. Mentoring and trauma-informed approaches were described by interviewees as

particularly important in enabling schools to identify and address the underlying reasons behind the kinds of behaviours for which pupils might otherwise be suspended and excluded.

The provision of one-to-one mentoring by trained adults to support vulnerable children is a recommendation contained in the YEF practice guidance. The guidance states that effective mentoring can help children 'form a good relationship with a positive role model, develop social skills and positive behaviours and form constructive relationships with others' (YEF, 2024b). These benefits were also highlighted by interviewees.

The YEF practice guidance states that there is as yet insufficient evidence to understand whether and how **training teachers in trauma-informed approaches** has an impact on children's involvement in violence, and so this is not currently included in its recommended practice. The YEF is funding evaluation to build the evidence base on trauma-informed practice training, but in the meantime, it notes that 'acknowledging the impact that trauma can have and continuing to be curious about the causes of children's behaviour is sensible'. Interviewees echoed this view of curiosity, explaining that understanding the causes of disruptive behaviours is critical to identifying effective responses and sustainable solutions. Interviewees also cautioned that children's disruptive and violent behaviours are so often rooted in trauma and adverse experiences that school responses to behaviour that are not grounded in an understanding of these dynamics can themselves have a damaging impact on children's psychological safety and ability to form trusting relationships.

Figure 7: Spotlight on practice: Carr Manor Community School

Carr Manor Community School is an LA-maintained school for around 1,500 children aged 2-19 in Leeds, West Yorkshire in England. The school serves a community facing significant challenges, including poverty, and its children speak a total of 70 different languages. The school has high attendance and has not excluded a pupil for 18 years.

The school credits its high attendance and low exclusion rates to the relationships-centred approach it has employed for nearly 20 years, which is informed by restorative practice. This relational approach informs all practices and policies within the school, as do the school's core values, the first of which is 'knowing our children well'. One way in which this value is practised is through the school's workforce, 150 of whom are child-facing. Instead of forming groups, Carr Manor runs a coaching system where every adult in the organisation is responsible for a mixed-age group of between 10 and 12 children (from reception to Year 5 or from Year 6 to Year 11). Coaches include not only teachers but also administrative staff, technicians, caretakers and other school staff. This practice means that it is the responsibility of every adult in the school to get to know the children, their needs and the wider context (including home circumstances). Support can then be tailored to needs based on this informed view.

The school's leadership acknowledged that this model presented some challenges when it was first rolled out but that, ultimately, the coaching model has supported its staff recruitment and retention, as it ensures that those applying to work at the school are interested in supporting children.

Starting first thing each Monday, every coaching group meets for three extended sessions a week for community-building activities and to share how they are feeling. The school's leadership credits its Monday morning sessions with supporting the school's high level of attendance by providing a softer start to the week and allowing every member of the school community to have the space to be listened to. In these sessions, coaching groups sit in a circle to listen to and respect one another and bridge home and school life by discussing how everyone's weekend was and what they are looking forward to in the week ahead.

Carr Manor does not employ an isolation room or commission external AP. The school runs an off-site provision called Restore for children at risk of exclusion. Restore serves pupils at Carr Manor and at eight neighbouring schools.

While a systematic review of evidence on restorative practice in schools found that there were few rigorous impact evaluations assessing effectiveness, there is evidence suggesting such approaches can reduce suspensions and bullying in school (Zakszeski and Rutherford, 2021; Gregory et al., 2019; Bonell et al., 2018).

2.3.5. Some schools are spending resources on counterproductive or unproven approaches

A small proportion of Teacher Tapp survey respondents reported that their schools delivered **approaches that, according to the YEF practice guidance, have been shown to cause harm** rather than help. Five per cent of respondents said their schools delivered 'assemblies or lessons from former prisoners explaining what prison is like', and 1% had arranged 'trips to prisons to show children what it's like' despite evidence that prison awareness programmes are, in fact, counterproductive (YEF, 2024b).

A larger proportion of respondents (30%) noted that their schools were delivering knife crime awareness assemblies or lessons, for which there is no robust evidence of effectiveness (YEF, 2024b).

As we explore further in the next chapter, interviewees discussed a lack of awareness within schools of existing evidence about what works in preventing children's involvement in violence. These Teacher Tapp findings highlight the need to promote awareness and understanding of that evidence among school stakeholders, particularly those deciding which practices to invest their resources in.

2.3.6. There is a lack of data on the scale and outcomes of unofficial exclusions

There are no officially recorded national data in England or Wales on internal exclusions (where children are removed from class for a limited period but remain on the school site, which is not in itself unlawful), internal AP (where children may be placed in smaller classes and potentially on a reduced, individually tailored timetable, which can be lawful) or informal exclusions (where children are directed off school sites without being officially suspended or excluded, which is unlawful when done without following the formal school exclusion process). Neither the number and characteristics of pupils affected by these practices nor their outcomes are currently known.

In the absence of official statistics, the National Foundation For Educational Research (NFER) is currently undertaking research to estimate the prevalence of internal AP (NFER, ND). Similarly, Power and Taylor (2024b) have attempted to address the lack of evidence on the scale of unofficial exclusions through their WISERD Multi Cohort Study. This study asked 1,500 pupils in Wales how often they had been asked to leave the classroom, finding that 41% of Year 9 pupils had been asked to leave the classroom at least once during one academic year, and 6.9% had been asked to do this frequently (about once a week). The study also observed considerable school-level variations in the incidence of this form of exclusion by schools, ranging from 52% of pupils in one school being asked to leave the classroom at least once during the year to 14% in another school. The study found that boys were approximately twice as likely as girls to be asked to leave the classroom frequently.

Interviewees described a range of approaches and attitudes to internal and informal exclusions and internal AP. Most interviewees were aware of children being removed to isolation booths or rooms primarily as a punitive (rather than supportive) measure in some schools. However, when speaking with headteachers who employed internal exclusions and internal AP, these interviewees usually described the practices as aiming to enable children who struggle to engage or behave well in standard classrooms to be nonetheless held within and supported by their school community rather than as punitive measures. There was also disagreement among interviewees regarding the outcomes of internal exclusions and internal AP, with one describing them as disproportionately damaging the learning of some groups of children (such as children from Traveller communities and those with SEN) and, therefore, discriminatory. Others felt that as part of a behaviour management strategy, they could reduce the need for suspensions and exclusions.

The extent of the association between internal or informal exclusion, internal AP and official suspensions and exclusions cannot be fully understood based on current data. As Power and Taylor (2024b) noted, however, there is a possibility that 'classroom exclusion […] may mark the beginning of a trajectory towards school exclusion'. Investigating the possibility of extending the School Census to collect data on the scale of these practices would, therefore, be worthwhile.

2.3.7. Managed moves may be used to reduce the need for exclusion, but many attempted managed moves are unsuccessful

Managed moves are also not officially recorded in national data sources for England or Wales. It is, therefore, difficult to know how many pupils experience managed moves or whether and how the number of managed moves has changed over time (e.g. in response to the Covid-19 pandemic).

FFT has attempted to estimate the number of young people experiencing a successful managed move in England between 2014/15 and 2021/22 using School Census data (FFT, 2024d). This involves identifying pupils who had one main enrolment and one subsidiary enrolment at the same time, who then transferred from the school at which they had the main enrolment to the one at which they had the subsidiary enrolment. In the three years up to and including 2018/19, there were around 6,000 potential managed moves each year. This number fell during the pandemic, decreasing to just over 5,000 in 2021/22. Over the period 2014/15 to 2021/22, 22% of managed moves resulted in pupils moving from a mainstream school to the AP sector without ever being permanently excluded.

However, analyses by the Education Policy Institute (2024a) suggest that **over half of managed moves are unsuccessful**. These analyses found that while an estimated 14.7 pupils per 1,000 in the 2017 cohort in England experienced a managed move at some point in their secondary school career, data collected from a quarter of LAs suggested that 60% of attempted managed moves were unsuccessful, with pupils returning to their origin school (Education Policy Institute, 2024a).

The analysis by FFT (2024e) suggests that **risk factors for managed moves appear to be similar to those of permanent exclusions**. Pupils with a history of involvement with social care, a history of SEN or a history of FSM eligibility are more likely to experience a managed move. There was a much more even gender balance among pupils experiencing a managed move than those experiencing permanent exclusions; 52% of these pupils were boys.

While our interviews did not focus on managed moves as a strategy for reducing the need for exclusion, we suggest this practice would be worth researching further. It would also be worthwhile collecting official data on the number of managed moves across England and Wales to better understand the scale of this practice and the characteristics and outcomes of those affected.

2.3.8. Evidence strongly suggests that some schools are unlawfully off-rolling pupils

As discussed in the previous chapter, off-rolling is the unlawful practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using an official exclusion when the removal is primarily in the best interest of the school rather than the best interest of the pupil. **Given that off-rolling is**

unlawful, it is difficult to identify, and there are no official statistics available in either England or Wales. Data in both England and Wales track how pupils move in or out of schools but not the reason for each move.

Interviewees nonetheless told us that they were aware of the practice happening. This included professionals working in schools and those providing support to pupils and families who had disclosed that they had felt pressured by a school to remove their child from roll.

In Wales, a report from Estyn suggests that the number of Year 10 pupils who do not progress to Year 11 indicates that some schools may be off-rolling pupils, and the reason for this may be so that these pupils are not included in the school's KS4 performance data (Estyn, 2019). Estyn's response to a 2018 review of registration practices of pupils who leave school to be educated other than at school (Welsh government, 2018c) similarly suggested that some schools appeared to take advantage of regulations regarding dual registration of pupils to improve their KS4 performance data.

In its 2021/22 Annual Report, Ofsted (2022) identified that in 2020, there were 320 schools in England that exhibited 'exceptional levels of pupil movement' and 160 schools in 2021. Ofsted noted that the data alone 'does not tell us why pupils moved' or that off-rolling was a practice and that they investigate each case individually with schools during inspections (Ofsted, 2022).

FFT has also attempted to estimate the number of cases of off-rolling in England by observing the extent to which pupils leave schools (FFT, 2024i). This analysis found that 7% of pupils who were on roll in Year 7 in state-funded mainstream schools in January 2019 (equating to 41,000 pupils) were no longer on roll in any state-funded mainstream school by January 2023 (when they should have been in Year 11). While some were recorded as having been permanently excluded or having changed mainstream schools, almost half (19,000) of those not attending a state-funded mainstream school had no observed destination (which will include pupils who are home-educated or who have emigrated, for example). This analysis also indicates that **pupils with lower levels of KS2 attainment, those with a history of suspensions and those with EHC plans were more likely to leave the state-funded mainstream sector**. Similarly, research by the Education Policy Institute (2024a) identified that the 6% of pupils in the 2018/19 Year 11 cohort in England who experienced an unexplained school transfer were more likely to have had a **history of involvement with social services, had a persistent history of FSM eligibility, had social-emotional and mental health needs or been persistently absent** (Ibid.).

A poll by YouGov found that teachers in England who had experience of off-rolling were more likely to teach in secondary schools than primary schools and were more likely to work in academies than in LA, grammar, independent or other schools (Ofsted, 2019c). In the poll, teachers reported that, as with permanent exclusions, persistent disruptive behaviour was the most common reason that schools gave to parents for off-rolling pupils and that they

believed **off-rolling is often motivated by the desire to achieve or maintain a school's high position in a league table**.

2.4. Providing support to children in alternative provision and pupil referral unit settings, children who have been excluded and children missing education

2.4.1. Alternative provision and pupil referral unit settings provide support to children who have experienced or are at risk of suspension and exclusion, but this sector is under strain

AP and PRU provisions can be used as temporary and/or part-time interventions with the aim of preventing the need for exclusion. **Children who are suspended or excluded can also mainly receive their education within these settings.**

Published DfE statistics for the 2023/24 academic year show that 15,866 pupils were attending state-funded AP as their main school (DfE, 2024o).[18] When pupils with subsidiary enrolments in AP schools (who have a different main school but spend some of the week at an AP school) are included, the number of pupils on roll in AP schools in January 2024 increases to 26,900. The January snapshot does not, however, capture the fluid nature of AP enrolment numbers. Pupil numbers in individual AP schools tend to increase as the year progresses. According to research conducted by FFT using National Pupil Database data, the number of pupils on roll (including subsidiary registrations) in state-funded AP schools increased from 20,824 to 28,642 (an increase of 38%) between October 2022 and May 2023 (FFT, 2024g). In Wales, available statistics show that the total number of pupils educated other than at school (including in PRUs) was 1,785 (Stats Wales, 2019).

No data on the number of places in each AP school are centrally available, but pressure on places in the AP sector has been reported in the education trade press and was discussed by our interviewees (Schools Week, 2023). Although there are fewer pupils being taught in the AP sector in England than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there are also fewer schools, with the number of AP schools declining from 352 in 2018/19 to 333 in 2023/24. In addition to publishing statistics on the total number of pupils in AP schools (including subsidiary registrations), it would be worth it for national governments to collect information on the number of places in each AP school each year to support AP planning.

There are disproportionate numbers of boys, pupils of Black Caribbean or Mixed White/Black Caribbean ethnicity, pupils recorded as having SEN and pupils eligible for FSM in AP schools in England. FFT has analysed the characteristics of pupils attending AP in

[18] This includes PRUs and AP academies.

England (FFT, 2024h). In Summer 2022, 71% of pupils attending AP schools with single or main registrations and 59% of subsidiary registered pupils were male. This compares to 51% of pupils in mainstream and special schools. Seventy-three per cent of main registered pupils and 78% of subsidiary registered pupils were White British compared to 64% of pupils in mainstream and special schools. Pupils of a Black Caribbean (3% main registered, 2% subsidiary registered and 1% of pupils in mainstream and special schools) or Mixed White/Black Caribbean ethnicity (4% main registered, 4% subsidiary registered and 3% of pupils in mainstream and special schools) were also over-represented in the AP sector. Eighty-two per cent of single or main registered pupils and 77% of subsidiary registered pupils were recorded as having SEN, compared to 17% of pupils in mainstream and special schools. In the majority of cases, AP pupils were identified as having SEMH needs as their primary type of SEN (55% of main registered, 33% of subsidiary registered and 3% of pupils in mainstream and special schools). Fifty-five per cent of main registered pupils and 46% of subsidiary registered pupils were eligible for FSM compared to 23% of pupils in mainstream and special schools.

Once they have attended an AP, the chances of reintegrating into a mainstream school are lower for older pupils in England. FFT (forthcoming) calculated that 30% of KS3 pupils who attended an AP school for at least one day in 2021/22 had been reintegrated into mainstream schools during the 2022/23 academic year. Reintegration rates were highest among pupils who had never been identified as having SEN and among those who had never been permanently excluded. Reintegration rates for those in KS4 (above Year 10) were found to be much lower.

2.4.2. The quality of alternative and pupil referral unit provision varies significantly

AP and PRU settings vary significantly in terms of the number and characteristics of pupils they teach, their pupil length of stay, the nature of their curriculum and their models of provision, which may be shaped by local demand, contexts and policies (Welsh government, 2018b). There is also evidence suggesting the **quality of support for children in AP and PRU settings is highly variable within England and Wales**.

As discussed in the previous chapter, national governments in England and Wales have recognised issues with the consistency and quality of education and support for pupils in this sector. Similarly, the Excluded Lives project has shown a wide variety of different providers and uses of AP in England and Wales, a significant lack of recording or monitoring of AP and a wide range in the quality of specialist support (Excluded Lives, ND).

Interviewees discussed concerns about how AP and PRU settings could overcome these difficulties. While it was recognised that the quality of provision in some of these settings needs urgently to be improved, some interviewees also highlighted that **recent practice models and approaches had enabled some AP and PRU settings to develop expertise in –**

and garner a reputation for – delivering high-quality practices to support pupils with significant vulnerabilities and multiple complex needs. There was a hope that with sufficient funding and support, AP and PRUs could continue to develop this specialist expertise and become better recognised as centres of excellence for the most vulnerable pupils. The Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) pilot programme was highlighted in particular as helping to improve the quality of support to vulnerable pupils in AP settings.

Figure 8: Spotlight on practice: multidisciplinary, on-site support to pupils in alternative provision

Several of our interviewees working in AP and PRU settings highlighted the importance of providing multidisciplinary support to meet the wide range of needs, vulnerabilities and disadvantages faced by pupils in their schools. This support was seen as vital to efforts to promote positive outcomes for pupils in this sector, who, on average, have significantly worse attendance, attainment and post-16 outcomes than their counterparts in mainstream schools.

Among AP and PRU heads, as well as some mainstream school heads and wider education system stakeholders, the APST pilot programme was viewed as providing a particularly promising model for this support. The APST programme, launched by the DfE in 2021, provided 22 AP schools with funding for embedded teams of multidisciplinary and multiagency specialists, co-located in schools and working together to provide support to pupils.

The model requires schools to appoint an SLT Lead and recruit or second an APST Coordinator and specialists from at least four of the following disciplines: speech and language therapy, mental health (including counselling), post-16 transition coaching, youth work, family support work, youth justice, educational psychology and children's social work.

The ongoing independent evaluation of APST – funded by YEF and conducted by RAND Europe – has not yet concluded. Final findings on whether and, if so, how and why APST works are not yet available. It is not yet known whether APST has made a difference in pupil outcomes. However, emerging findings from the process evaluation provide us with some early indications of what professionals working in and with the APST schools thought about APST.

APST was felt to provide AP schools with additional capacity and skills to support pupils holistically. Staff involved overwhelmingly reported that having teams of multidisciplinary specialists working together and co-located within the AP school meant that pupils were able to receive more timely, comprehensive and integrated support to meet their needs than was previously possible. Staff also felt that APST had improved pupils' access to needs assessments and diagnoses, reduced the number of referrals that needed to be made to

external services with long waiting lists and improved the quality of referrals that still needed to be made.

APST was felt to support AP schools in improving their safeguarding practices and to contribute to a more trauma-informed and trauma-aware culture and practice in some schools. Staff also reported that APST specialists shared their knowledge and skills with other staff and brought informed perspectives from new disciplines into the AP school, which meant the workforces at those schools felt better able to support children with high needs.

RAND Europe is conducting the YEF-funded independent evaluation of APST impact, processes and costs over its first three years. Impact results are yet to be reported but are due to be published in July 2025. With permission from the YEF, our discussion here draws on formative learning from the process evaluation. (For further information about the evaluation, see YEF [2023b].)

2.4.3. Data on outcomes for pupils who attend alternative provision and pupil referral units is limited but shows significantly worse outcomes than their peers in mainstream schools

While limited data are published about outcomes for pupils who attend AP schools in England and PRUs in Wales, the existing data demonstrate that pupils who attend AP in England have significantly worse outcomes than their peers in mainstream schools. While this is likely to be linked to the disproportionate level of need among AP cohorts (including higher levels of SEN and FSM eligibility than their counterparts in mainstream schools), it underscores the urgency of ensuring these pupils can be provided with the additional support they need.

Attendance rates among pupils at AP schools are well below those of the general school population. DfE statistics for 2022/23 show that pupils enrolled in PRUs missed 41% of sessions (equivalent to two days per week), while 38% of pupils were severe absentees, missing at least 50% of sessions (DfE, 2024p). In 2022/23, the overall rate of absence in secondary schools was 9.0%, compared to 41.7% in AP schools (DfE, 2024m).

Attainment and participation in post-16 education are also lower for those in AP. In 2022/23, 6% of pupils who completed KS4 at an AP school (with a single or main registration) achieved the equivalent of grades 9-4 at GCSE in English and maths. This compared to a national average of 65%. Fourteen per cent of pupils were not entered for any accredited qualifications. Among an earlier cohort of those completing KS4 in 2020/21, 61% of girls and 52% of boys were in post-16 education in the following October, but by the following June, these figures had fallen to 45% and 39%, respectively (FFT, 2023d). In other words, despite mandatory participation in post-16 education to age 18, many young people who attend AP

schools do not make a successful transition to post-16 education, and among those who do, there is a substantial dropout.

Analysis suggests that pupils who have ever attended AP have poorer longer-term outcomes than pupils who have never attended AP. Around 3% to 4% of pupils in each age cohort attend an AP school at some time during their school careers (FFT, 2021). FFT tracked the long-term outcomes of pupils in the 2012/13 KS4 cohort who had experienced AP (FFT, 2022). The analysis found that by age 21, 28% had achieved Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework, the equivalent of five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (9-4), compared to 85% among those who never experienced AP. Thirty-one per cent of those who experienced AP had received out-of-work benefits at some point by age 19, compared to less than 6% of those who had never experienced AP.

2.4.4. Pupils who are excluded from school face disproportionately negative outcomes on a range of educational and longer-term indicators

The existing data suggest that pupils who have been excluded from school have significantly worse outcomes than their peers in mainstream schools. As with pupils in AP and PRUs, this highlights the need to ensure additional support can be provided to pupils with a history of school exclusion to support more positive outcomes among this cohort.

Destinations of permanently excluded pupils in England are varied. FFT (2023b) tracked the subsequent school journeys of pupils who were excluded in the 2018/19 school year in England. While around half of the 900 pupils who were excluded in Years 5 and 6 were attending state-funded mainstream schools in 2020/21, the same was true of only a quarter of the 3,700 pupils excluded when in Years 7 to 9. In a later analysis, FFT (2023c) examined the types of schools attended in 2022/23 by 15,717 pupils of compulsory school age who had been excluded up to the end of 2021/22. Just over a third (34%) were attending state-funded AP schools, 13% were in other LA-funded AP and 41% were attending other forms of state-funded schools (such as LA-funded or Academy mainstream schools). Twelve per cent were not observed in any state-funded education, which will include those missing education, as well as those who entered the independent sector, emigrated or died. The analysis also found that secondary **schools with an Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' are more likely to have larger proportions of previously excluded pupils on roll**, and many secondary schools have none at all.

Children in England and Wales who have been excluded have, on average, lower attainment than their non-excluded peers. The Timpson Review found that 7% of pupils who had been permanently excluded achieved grades A*-C (equivalent to 9-4) in GCSE English and maths in 2015/16 compared to a national average of 59%. More recently, FFT (2024f) found that 9% of pupils excluded during primary school went on to achieve grades 9-4 in GCSE English and maths in 2022/23 compared to a national average of 67%. Similarly, in Wales, an analysis by Tseliou et al. (forthcoming) showed that pupils with the greatest likelihood of being excluded

are the least likely to obtain a C grade or above in either English/Welsh, maths or science. They also showed that the impact of exclusions on attainment seems to be just as great for exclusions early in the educational lifecourse as for those in the later years. Their multivariate analysis, which controls for pupil characteristics including eligibility for FSM, SEN and gender, shows that pupils who experience frequent exclusions are 90% less likely to get a C grade or above in a core GCSE subject than pupils who are not excluded. (It should be noted that these analyses do not allow for causal inference, so they do not tell us whether exclusions cause lower attainment.)

Exclusions in England also appear to be associated with lower earnings and higher rates of being cautioned or sentenced for an offence. Using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes database, Haigney (2023) estimated that at the age of 25, earnings were 16.2% lower for permanently excluded pupils relative to their non-excluded peers. This increased to 23.9% when pupils were between 26 and 30 years old. An analysis of linked education and Ministry of Justice data found that 59% of pupils excluded from secondary school between 2007/08 and 2016/17 had received a caution or been sentenced for an offence, 22% had been cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence and 21% were classified as prolific offenders (DfE and Ministry of Justice, 2022). Among those cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence, the majority had been excluded before their first offence. In around a third of cases, the first offence preceded the exclusion. Later work by the DfE (2023c) also suggested that after controlling for a range of factors, children who had been cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence were more likely to have been excluded or suspended. (Again, these analyses do not allow for causal inference.)

2.4.5. Little is known about the outcomes of children missing education

As noted earlier in this report, accurate estimates of the number of children missing any form of education are hampered by the absence of mandatory reporting of these figures in both England and Wales and by inconsistencies in how figures are recorded in different LAs. There is an urgent need to ensure these children can be identified and reengaged with education.

Voluntary data collected from LAs by DfE are likely to be incomplete but suggest an estimated 117,100 children were children missing education at any time in 2022/23 (DfE, 2024t).

Recent research by the Education Policy Institute using a different methodology of comparing General Practice (GP) registrations with numbers of school registrations and children registered as receiving home education suggests that up to 300,000 children may be missing from education in England (Education Policy Institute, 2024c). This figure does not include children registered as educated at home.

Recent research by the Welsh government similarly compared GP registrations with school census and EOTAS data and estimated that approximately 6% of children (equating to 24,000 in total) were missing from state education on one day in April 2021 (Welsh government,

2024g). This figure includes home-educated children and those educated in independent schools and schools in England, so the number of children missing any form of education is, therefore, likely to be lower.

While these **estimates suggest many thousands of children are missing out on their entitlement to education**, very little is known about their circumstances and outcomes, partly due to the 'inherently hidden nature of many cases' (Education Policy Institute, 2024c). This is particularly concerning given that the Education Policy Institute research suggests **these children are disproportionately likely to have additional vulnerabilities**, including a history of school exclusion; some forms of SEN, including SEMH; persistent disadvantage; and experience of the care system (Ibid.). On average, children with these characteristics are also known to have higher rates of involvement in offending and violence (DfE, 2022c; DfE, 2023c). While keeping children in education is an important element of violence prevention, there is a particularly urgent need to identify those who are currently missing out on any form of education and to provide support to enable (re-)engagement.

2.5. Providing trusted adults and supporting the development of social and emotional skills

Compared to the evidence on attendance, suspensions and exclusions, **quantitative data on the scale of provision of trusted adults and support to develop social-emotional skills in England and Wales are far more limited**. Nonetheless, as with other practices recommended by YEF to prevent children's involvement in violence, practice appears to be inconsistent across England and Wales. As we explore further in the next chapter, many schools operating in challenging contexts struggle to prioritise this work.

2.5.1. Provision of evidence-based approaches to developing children's relationships with trusted adults varies considerably across England and Wales

The YEF practice guidance (2024b) recommends that to support children in developing relationships with trusted adults, education settings 'provide one-to-one mentoring by trained adults to support vulnerable children' and 'engage vulnerable children in sports with coaches who can support them'. The YEF-commissioned Teacher Tapp provides some insight into the extent to which these recommended actions are delivered in schools. The survey found that of 9,382 teachers who responded, 42% of teachers said their schools delivered '**mentoring** specifically for poorly behaved children', while 23% said their schools delivered '**sports or outdoor adventure activities** for poorly behaved children'.

Our interviewees also discussed a range of strategies employed in schools to provide children with trusted adults. In some schools, there was reportedly an emphasis on **ensuring all teachers had the skills to build trusting relationships** with their pupils. In some, there was an emphasis on the **provision of pastoral staff, mentors, coaches and youth workers** – either

employed by the school or commissioned from external providers – to build relationships focused on the holistic needs of the child. This was felt by some interviewees to be particularly important given the requirement that teachers focus to a large degree on children's progress in learning. According to these interviewees, non-teaching staff may be viewed by pupils as more approachable. Youth work skills in relational practice were also viewed as key to building trust and open communication with pupils about their needs and the risks they may face.

Interviewees discussed the benefits of providing **enrichment activities** with the aim of enabling pupils to develop interests, motivation, resilience and confidence. Some described how adventure and wilderness activities can help children build relationships with trusted adults who can engage and support them. Some described the importance of outdoor activities that enable pupils to interact with peers in natural settings and so develop social and emotional skills.

2.5.2. Provision of evidence-based approaches to developing children's social and emotional skills varies considerably across England and Wales

To support the development of children's social and emotional skills, the guidance recommends developing those skills 'with a universal curriculum, targeted support and whole-school strategies', implementing an anti-bullying strategy and supporting access to therapy for children who need additional support (YEF, 2024b).

Just under half (49%) of teachers said their schools delivered '**social skills lessons** that teach children to manage emotions'. More than half (57%) said their school delivered **anti-bullying** programmes. Just 10% said their school delivered '**cognitive behavioural therapy** for poorly behaved children'. Interviewees also discussed strategies that were targeted at developing specific emotional skills. This included, for example, a school that provided a **series of sessions on emotions,** such as anger, sadness, empathy and so on. These aimed to enable pupils to develop an understanding of their own and others' emotions and gain the emotional literacy required to communicate effectively about them.

Some of our interviewees also discussed arranging **Emotional Literacy Support Assistant training for staff** in their schools. This course aims to equip professionals with the skills needed to support children's social and emotional development, with a particular focus on emotional literacy, managing anxiety and strong feelings, emotional regulation, self-esteem, building relationships, managing conflict and problem-solving.

In a context of high demand for external mental health and wellbeing services, interviewees also discussed what schools are doing to provide **in-school specialist mental health support** directly to pupils, employing counsellors and other mental health professionals and sometimes providing more extensive support within wellbeing centres or support centres located within the school.

2.5.3. Too few pupils are receiving effective education on relationship violence reduction

As part of developing social and emotional skills, the YEF practice guidance also recommends 'providing relationship violence reduction sessions to secondary-age children'.

This warrants particular attention given the context of high numbers of children experiencing violence and abuse within their relationships. Recent research from the YEF (2024c) sets out results from a survey of 10,387 children between 13 and 17 years old. The survey found that of the 27% of children aged 13 to 17 who had been in a romantic relationship over the previous year, almost half (46%) had experienced some form of controlling behaviour, while almost a third (31%) had experienced physical or sexual violence.

Both the existing evidence and our interviewees suggest a worrying picture of **inadequate provision and varying quality of relationship violence reduction sessions**. The YEF-commissioned Teacher Tapp survey found that 22% of teachers said their schools provided teacher-delivered lessons focused on reducing dating/relationship violence, 16% provided lessons or activities on these issues delivered by external providers and 9% provided teacher-delivered lessons on intervention in sexual assault.

The YEF's recent survey found that while 76% of pupils said they had received some form of education on dating and relationships in the previous year, the reach of lessons is uneven (YEF, 2024c). The most commonly taught topics were sexual consent and harassment, but only 55% of pupils said they had received lessons on consent, and only 43% had lessons on harassment. Children who reported that they had engaged in sexually violent behaviours were less likely to have had lessons on these topics, with only 39% saying they had received lessons on consent and 31% on harassment. Of all pupils surveyed, only 40% said they had received lessons on how to be in healthy and respectful romantic relationships.

Our interviewees also emphasised that both the content and the quality of teaching on relationships and sex are highly inconsistent, with teaching often not delivered by specialist teachers. Overall, the evidence shows that **pupils are not consistently receiving high-quality education on sex and relationships**, from healthy relationships and consent to violence and abuse in relationships and sexual harassment.

2.6. Conclusion

The evidence demonstrates that rates of absence, suspensions and exclusions from schools have risen since before the Covid-19 pandemic. These rates are also clearly patterned by intersectional characteristics, demonstrating disproportionality in outcomes along the lines of ethnicity, additional learning needs and deprivation. This indicates an urgent need for education policy, funding and system changes to ensure more schools have the support they need to deliver effective, equitable practice to keep children in education.

Perhaps our most consistent finding is that practices to improve attendance, reduce the need for suspensions and exclusions, provide support to pupils at risk of missing education, provide trusted adults and develop social and emotional skills are highly inconsistent. There are clear examples of practices aiming to improve pupil outcomes and address disproportionality, but there remains a need to build the evidence base and embed what works comprehensively across education systems in England and Wales.

The following chapter explores the variety of challenges education settings face in delivering effective, equitable work to prevent children's involvement in violence.

3. Challenges for education settings in reducing children's involvement in violence

3.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses our fourth research question:

- **What is <u>preventing more education settings from delivering good (effective and/or racially equitable and inclusive) practice</u> regarding violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults and developing children's social and emotional skills)?**

Findings are drawn from our interviews and literature review.

The discussion begins by setting out perspectives on the severity of need among children and their families and on the ways in which external agencies (outside of the education system) are struggling to meet those needs and coordinate support with schools. We then turn to an examination of aspects of the education policy and system context that directly impact the extent to which schools are able to deliver good practices to prevent violence. Key challenges for violence prevention in education settings identified in our review include education funding levels and systems, the complexity of the landscape of different school types in England, particular pressures facing the AP and PRU sector, the focus and scope of the national curriculum in England, issues with the school inspection system in England, gaps in staff skills and training, difficulties in recruitment and retention of the school workforce, barriers to equitable and inclusive practice to support children of minoritised ethnicities, school-level behaviour policies, limited awareness in schools of what evidence-based practice to prevent violence looks like, and school-level challenges around gathering and analysing pupil data to support the delivery of effective practice.

3.2. Children and families face increasingly severe and complex needs, creating challenges for school attendance and engagement

Significant increases in the level and complexity of pupils' needs were described by 36 of our interviewees, while 27 described increasingly severe and complex needs among pupils' families. Interviewees discussed how these high needs can create barriers to attending, engaging in and behaving as expected in school and increase vulnerability to suspensions and exclusions. As needs increase, schools also struggle to provide the support children need to overcome them.

Increasing poverty and deprivation among children and families was seen as a particularly important barrier to school attendance and engagement. An analysis of government statistics on UK households below the average income suggests that the number of children living in

relative poverty (after housing costs) in the UK grew steadily from 3.6m in 2011/12 to a record high of 4.4m in 2022/23, equating to a rise of 20.6% over that period (IfG, 2024a). Interviewees described widespread issues with families facing a lack of money to meet the costs of sending children to school and meeting the school's requirements. Families not having money for uniforms and transport to school, for example, makes it more difficult for children to attend school regularly, on time and in the right uniform. Cases were also described of children missing or being late to school because they were caring for siblings while their parents were at work.

> *'We were told this is a [pupil] with mental health problems. [They had] been excluded because [they had] talked back to teachers, consistently turned up late for school, [failed] to attend a detention and [refused] to follow school uniform policy. It took us three weeks of mentoring to realise and understand [what the issue was]. What we found out was that [their parent] has taken on additional hours of work on some days to try and make ends meet. There is only one pair of shoes, so on those days [the pupil] wears trainers to school, for which [they get] then told [they are] not following school uniform policy. And on the way to school, [the pupil] takes [their sibling] to school, who has additional needs, because [their parent is] working. This means it's impossible for [the pupil] to get to school on time'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

In addition – and related – to increasing poverty, a range of intersecting needs were described by our interviewees as increasing the challenges faced by schools in meeting children's needs and keeping them engaged in education. These needs included **increasing levels of complexity in pupils' family and home circumstances** and an increasing number of pupils with parents experiencing mental health difficulties, alcohol and substance misuse, and domestic violence. There was a concern that children experiencing poverty and complex home lives are more likely to have mental health difficulties and are more vulnerable to exploitation.

In this context, interviewees also described **increasing mental health needs** being caused or compounded by a range of factors. Official statistics from the NHS, based on survey data, suggest that 'between 2017 and 2022, rates of probable mental disorder [such as depression or anxiety] increased from around 1 in 8 young people aged 7-16 to more than 1 in 6' (NHS, 2022). Interviewees noted that for children from minoritised ethnicities, experiences of **racism** could intersect with other disadvantages, resulting in multiplicative negative effects on wellbeing. Increasing use of **social media** was described as profoundly affecting pupils' mental health and behaviour, including through cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content and amplification of conflicts and misunderstandings. **Covid-19** was also felt to have compounded children's mental health needs, including increasing children's anxieties and making it more difficult for children to develop social and emotional skills due to the lack of interaction with peers and institutions during lockdowns and school closures. Some explained that for some children, Covid-19 had interrupted the early years of development**,** citing

increasing numbers of children starting school with lower levels of development than expected and without basic self-care skills, such as toilet training and dressing.

> *'The damage that COVID has done to children and young people's mental health in terms of confidence, anxiety, depression. Because children were locked in their homes for a year and a half, it wasn't a level playing field. We've got people who live on 500-acre farms here. We've got people who live in very, very small council accommodation with varying degrees of family support'.* (Education senior leader)

Some interviewees reflected that the closure of schools and families' experiences of home-schooling during Covid-19 had led some families to place lower importance on ensuring their children attend school regularly, particularly in cases where parents had had poor experiences with the educational system themselves.

> *'Amongst a minority of families, what was seen previously as an absolute expectation, [that] you should go to school, was broken because people have realised "Well, actually, for two years, [the message was] you don't have to go to school". Once that kind of trust has been broken, there's very little apart from the fixed penalty notices and support that you can do. We see the massive upturn in elective home education, so parents who for one reason or [another] decided with the school, the school system is not for them'.* (Education senior leader)

Interviewees also described an **increase in children with undiagnosed SEN** arriving at AP and PRU settings after experiencing exclusions. Interviewees explained that these children had not received diagnoses or support, and so had struggled to attend, engage and behave as expected at their mainstream schools, which, in turn, had led to exclusion. As discussed in the previous chapter, children with SEN are more likely to be persistently absent from school, and those with SEN but no EHC plan are more likely to be excluded.

> *'One of the biggest issues we face in AP is undiagnosed needs. Young people are being permanently excluded without formal assessments or even individual plans from mainstream schools that reflect their needs. A lot of young people come through with SEND needs, 100%, but are not necessarily diagnosed with anything specific'.* (Education senior leader)

Overall, this picture of increased needs and increasingly complex behaviours among children was connected by interviewees to growing levels of persistent absence, suspensions and exclusions as schools struggle to overcome needs-related barriers to school engagement and to growing vulnerability to involvement in violence and exploitation.

> *'Schools and teachers seem to be saying that the increase in complex and challenging behaviour, and what was often called dysregulated behaviour, is increasing so much that they have […] little other choice, really, but to issue temporary or permanent exclusions because the behaviour is getting so bad'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Reflecting the findings of a DfE analysis of national statistics, interviewees recognised that children living in poverty, who are eligible for FSM, with mental health needs, with SEN, who attend AP or PRUs, and who have histories of persistent absence, suspension or exclusion have higher than average rates of involvement in offending behaviour and violence (DfE, 2022c; DfE, 2023c).

3.3. External agencies are struggling to provide effective, timely, coordinated support to meet children's needs

In the context of increasing needs among children and families, 26 interviewees raised concerns that local services and agencies are facing significant financial strain and struggling to meet the level of demand for support. In the absence of a well-functioning ecosystem of local support services for vulnerable children, **many mainstream schools and AP and PRU settings feel they are under increasing pressure to fill gaps in support**.

A range of external agencies and support services work to support children with additional needs. This includes children's social care, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), speech and language therapy, youth offending/justice services, youth workers and third sector/community organisations, such as youth centres, libraries and sports clubs.

The existing evidence supports interviewees' views of these services as struggling. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) shows that between 2009/10 and 2019/20, while LAs faced rising demand from population growth and increased poverty, government grant funding to councils was cut by approximately 40% in real terms (IfG, 2024b). In the context of these pressures, LAs significantly cut spending, particularly on preventative and universal services. Spending on youth services and children's centres, for example, reduced by more than three-quarters (77.9%) in real terms between 2009/10 and 2022/23 (Ibid.).

> *'I think one of the shames […] is what's happened to the youth sector in the last few years, post-austerity. I think that [the] kind of trusted adult relationship in the community and [the] bridging into schools that youth workers brought in particular has been lost. We see a lot of schools trying to hire those kinds of roles, you know, mentorship roles, attendance mentors, etcetera. To kind of try and deal with some of the [gaps] there'.* (Education practitioner)

Interviewees and the reviewed literature highlighted that these **external agencies and support services struggle to provide high-quality, timely support to all children who need help** (YEF, 2024a). Reflecting findings from the literature, interviewees expressed the view that this was due to **significant financial strain on services** rooted in austerity measures that reduced funding for public and third sector services that played a crucial role in supporting pupils and their families (IfG, 2022). Interviewees described long-term underfunding, combined with the high level of need among children and families, as directly resulting in **increasingly inadequate capacity** within these services to provide the required level of support.

'You can't rely on even statutory agencies because they've been cut. […] We're constantly having to push against a threshold that is, in my opinion, too high, just to keep children safe and to get the involvement of statutory agencies. At the end of the day, we're only teachers'. (Education senior leader)

In the context of demand for support from external services outstripping supply, interviewees highlighted that many children are not receiving the support they need when they need it. They described **high thresholds for accessing support services**, meaning that only the most severe cases receive attention, leaving many children without the early intervention needed to prevent an escalation of problems. In the case of mental health services, for example, interviewees noted that long waiting times mean that children in need of urgent support may remain on waiting lists for extended periods while their mental health worsens. One interviewee noted that young people are unlikely to see a mental health professional unless they are '*suffering a mental health crisis*'. Another described a particularly concerning case, where a child '*attempt[ed] suicide three times'* before they were offered an appointment with the adolescent mental health team in the area. Analysis from the Local Government Association suggests that only around one in four children who needed mental health services in 2019/20 were able to access them, with the majority either unable to access treatment or having to 'wait so long their condition gets worse' (LGA, 2023).

'All external agencies are so pushed at the moment that students who really need the support […] At the moment, it's currently taking two years for neurodivergence referrals to come back. So we're identifying students who may be neurodivergent and just to have a diagnosis that's two years down the line. Students who are in crisis and who we would, in previous years, have been able to refer to CAMHS for them to be picked up quite quickly, they're not meeting the threshold. And you know, I don't know actually what these students have to do to meet this threshold. So there is a huge challenge there. And then the knock-on implications being that we are trying to manage more and more of these things in-house'. (Education senior leader)

Relatedly, interviewees reported that **high turnover rates and shortages of qualified staff in social services and other support agencies led to discontinuous and inconsistent practices.**

Finally, interviewees told us that even when children are receiving support from external services, **schools struggle to engage and coordinate with these services due to a lack of capacity and established systems to support effective multi-agency partnership working.** The different systems and cultures of education, health, criminal justice and youth services and the lack of a unified framework for multi-agency collaboration were viewed as creating difficulties in communicating and working well together. This reflects findings in the literature, which highlight that inconsistency in the quality and effectiveness of multi-agency collaboration is caused by siloed ways of working (Tejani et al., 2023). One interviewee described the ecosystem of support for children and families as '*a series of systems that clang against each other quite regularly*'. Fragmentation and siloed working were seen as undermining strategic coordination and collaboration between education settings, health,

children's social care, criminal justice and youth services to support children with additional needs.

> *'I think we have silos and, you know, huge separation of funding and services between what we deem to be education, what we deem to be health, what we deem to be criminal justice and real difficulties in bringing those services together'.*
> (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Interviewees raised concerns that in this context, many education settings feel the need to provide increasingly comprehensive support to their pupils. In turn, schools' attempts to mitigate the limitations of external service provision by extending the range of support they provide directly places additional pressure on school budgets.

3.4. Funding for schools is not adequate to support consistent, effective practices to prevent children's involvement in violence

When interviewees were asked what was preventing more schools from delivering good practices to prevent violence, the most frequently cited factor raised by 44 interviewees was funding.

Interviewees reflected that **schools and LAs in England and Wales operate within significant financial constraints, with many experiencing budget deficits** that affect the level and quality of support they can provide to children. The existing evidence supports this view. Analysis by IFS shows that schools in England and Wales have experienced cuts to capital funding and real-time cuts to per-pupil spending between 2010 and 2023 (IFS, 2024a; 2024b). Despite expected real-term increases in school spending from 2023 onwards, an analysis of data by NFER has shown that English schools still faced considerable cost pressures and made cuts in response in 2022/23 (NFER, 2024). While figures on academies are not yet published, DfE data suggest that over 10% of LA schools in England in 2022/23 operated at a budget deficit (DfE, 2024q). A survey of school leaders in Wales conducted by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) Cymru, a school leaders' union, in 2024 found that 29% reported their school was or would be in a budget deficit in the 2023/24 end-of-year budget (compared to 9% for 2020/21) (NAHT Cymru, 2024).

Financial constraints make it more difficult for schools to carry out good practices to reduce children's involvement in violence. Interviewees cited concerns, also raised in the literature, that stretched budgets can lead schools to **reduce or remove staff roles focused on providing support** to pupils or to rely on temporary contracts that result in frequent staff turnover. This often applies to roles such as mentors, youth workers, family liaison workers and counsellors, who all have a role in preventing children's involvement in violence.

> *'It's money. Ultimately, we have to make tough decisions every year because of real-term cuts. It's incredibly frustrating. Every year, we have to think about what we're not going to do or not do as much of. […] With budget cuts and austerity, teaching*

assistants started to disappear quite quickly. I think that was a mistake because […] those key relationships and key workers in schools are now few and far between, leading to an increase in permanent exclusions and children falling out of the system because there's no trusted adult. […] Finance is the major issue'. (Education SLT)

Financial constraints also mean it is **more difficult for schools to maintain extracurricular and enrichment programmes**, which are similarly important. Existing literature suggests that inadequate funding for dedicated support for children with high needs contributes to increased rates of absence and exclusions (Centre for Social Justice, 2023; Demie, 2022; Cole et al., 2019).

'There is a lack of cash coming in. […] Secondary schools are going into deficit budget. So we all then have to look at what [we can] cut to keep things going. […] So we've got to deliver maths, English, science; everything apart from that is under threat. So finance is the biggest challenge'. (Education SLT)

Interviewees felt that **financial constraints are not felt evenly across schools and that there are disparities in how school funding is allocated in different areas**. Some described a '*postcode lottery'* for school funding, resulting in unequal opportunities for pupils depending on their geographical location and the type of school they attend.

Interviewees reported that **financial constraints are most pressing when it comes to support for children with SEN and children requiring AP**. The SEND and AP improvement plan, published in 2023 (HM Government, 2023), recognised that LAs were spending more than planned on high-needs funding and announced plans to increase funding in 2023/24. Nonetheless, interviewees described a landscape of diminished real-terms funding resulting in reduced support for children with SEN. They raised concerns that schools are unable to meet the needs of children with SEN, leading to an increase in unofficial internal exclusions and formal school suspensions and exclusions.

The SEND and AP improvement plan (HM Government, 2023) notes that **systems around SEN funding are not working well**, and interviewees agreed. The Pplan states that despite increased investment, 'the system has become financially unsustainable, with no marked improvement in outcomes or experiences', while 'needs are identified late or incorrectly, with needs escalating and becoming more entrenched' (HM Government, 2023). In Wales, interviewees reported that ALN reform, which was intended to set standards for supporting children with ALN that would be cost-neutral for schools to implement, has ultimately led to increased costs for schools and LAs. In England, while schools must provide additional support for children identified as having SEN, they must cover some of these costs themselves, which interviewees described as a weighty disincentive against identification.

'There just isn't enough [money.] The way in which the SEND funding system works at the moment is an absolute nightmare and means that all the financial drivers are in directions that discourage schools from identifying children early because as soon as

you do […], the cost falls on the school. So, therefore, why would you do that?'
(Education system/policy stakeholder)

Regional and LA-level disparities in funding for support for children with SEN or who require alternative provision were also cited as challenges by our interviewees.

'If we're thinking about AP more globally, different local authorities fund placements at different levels. Our CEO is working at a high level with the DfE and other organisations to address this because the difference in funding for placements across the local authorities we work with is £10,000 per placement. That's ludicrous. There needs to be much more levelling up in that regard'. (Education senior leader)

'Particularly in AP and special education, the way funding works is challenging. For example, when the government says there's a fully funded pay rise, it's never fully funded for us. The mechanism for getting that money to us comes through the local authority […] via the high-needs budget, which is where we're funded from. The last "fully funded" pay rise cost me £80,000 a year'. (Education senior leader)

Interviewees reflected that more resources are needed to address the needs of children with SEN. They called for increases in the numbers of dedicated teachers, teaching assistants and roles to provide specialist support for SEMH, speech and language difficulties, and other needs affecting pupils' ability to engage with education. They also highlighted that this issue is compounded by a shortage of AP and specialist units to support children with high needs, which can leave schools reliant on expensive independent specialist provisions.

Finally, interviewees discussed how school buildings and grounds can affect their ability to deliver effective practices to prevent violence. Reflecting findings from reports by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) and the National Audit Office (2023), interviewees described **school buildings in need of funding for major rebuilding and refurbishment**, with a lack of space for classroom learning, for eating lunch and socialising together at break times, and for enrichment and support activities. There was a concern that schools, particularly AP and PRU settings, are operating in buildings that are not fit for purpose and that the state of disrepair in some schools leads to increased vandalism and a need for constant supervision.

3.5. Alternative provision and pupil referral unit settings face particular challenges in delivering support for children who have experienced or are at risk of exclusion

Eleven interviewees reported that **many AP and PRU settings in England and Wales are operating beyond their intended capacity**. This was attributed to increases in the number of pupils being excluded, the length of time pupils stay and the level of pupil need, which, it was thought, has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in funding. Interviewees noted that this makes it more difficult for AP and PRU settings to provide sufficient support to students.

'In some cases, we've seen a doubling of numbers, [where a setting has] gone from a 90-place provision to 180-place provision. If local authorities aren't getting on top of the trends of what's happening with these exclusions, the knock-on effect is EOTAS provision is growing exponentially, and, actually, that isn't always the best place for some of those learners'. (Education system/policy stakeholder)

'Permanent exclusions [have] spiralled, and that's from mainstream schools. APs are meant to pick up from the sixth day, but that's proving very difficult [… due to a] lack of places. […] We are currently about 35 to 40 children over capacity'. (Education SLT)

Interviewees reported that **AP and PRUs are being used to support students with increasingly complex needs and to provide more long-term specialised support**. This reflects evidence explored in the previous chapter that AP settings have higher levels of pupils with SEN than mainstream schools. Interviewees described a rise in children arriving in AP and PRUs with undiagnosed SEN and significant mental health needs who require additional support. Interviewees also flagged that some pupils who stay for extended periods in AP and PRUs then struggle to transition back to mainstream schools, which can lead to repeat exclusions.

'It's very clear guidance for pupil referral units about them being short-term turnaround provisions. That isn't happening. […] These pupils' needs are more complex and long-term. We are seeing the pupil age of referral for this provision getting younger, and they are needing to stay longer. So the consequence of that is that those places then become jammed because there isn't somewhere more appropriate for those young people to move on to. And in effect, […] our pupil referral units are becoming far more a type of "behaviour special school"'. (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Interviewees also raised that due to the lack of places in local AP and PRU settings, some children are being placed in settings outside of their home LA. Along with the general lack of capacity within AP and PRUs, this was viewed as contributing to **difficulties in effective partnership working between AP and PRU settings, mainstream schools and LAs** to ensure the effective use of placements and to support pupil transitions.

Reflecting evidence from the literature set out in previous chapters, interviewees reflected that the **quality of AP and PRUs in England and Wales is highly inconsistent**, with some providing excellent teaching and specialist support to cohorts with multiple complex needs while others struggle to deliver high-quality teaching and support.

3.6. The landscape of different school types may sometimes add to the complexities of coordinating support for vulnerable pupils

Given the need for partnership between mainstream schools, AP and PRU settings, and LAs, the complex landscape of different school types in England was viewed as bringing an additional challenge. Nine interviewees in England noted that the **mix of academies and**

maintained schools in England could sometimes add to the complexities of coordinating placements and support plans for children in the local area. For example, while all schools are expected to take part in their local Fair Access Protocol (to ensure all children have access to a school place), and interviewees described some MATs and academies taking active steps to collaborate locally, there were also concerns that LAs do not have many levers to encourage cooperation among local academy schools who do not engage. An investigation by Ofsted (2019d) into MATs found that the distribution of responsibilities and functions within MATs, including between individual schools, the trust and local governing bodies, 'are often unclear', including to the schools themselves. The Ofsted report found that MATs differed in their relationships with the LA and other schools in their locality, with some but not all working closely with the LA and other local schools.

3.7. The focus and scope of the national curriculum in England is not conducive to effective violence prevention

Concerns about the national curriculum in England were expressed by 22 interviewees, who highlighted ways in which it creates challenges for delivering good practices to prevent violence.[19]

Interviewees discussed a view of the national curriculum as **overly full**, leaving pupils with too much to learn. As a result, some interviewees thought that there was **insufficient room for teaching to focus on or prioritise the development of social and emotional skills** that help prevent violence.

Interviewees also described significant challenges in delivering effective teaching of a high-quality RSE curriculum. As noted in the previous chapter, interviewees described RSE as highly inconsistent in both content and quality. This is particularly concerning given there is good evidence that providing high-quality education on relationships is a protective factor against relationship-based violence among young people (YEF, 2024). Key **challenges in the effective delivery of the RSE curriculum included schools feeling the need to prioritise other aspects of the curriculum, a lack of high-quality teaching materials to support effective learning and a limited supply of a skilled workforce** to deliver this work.

> *'It's really, really patchy, and this is largely down to resources. […] So I think schools are struggling to make time in the curriculum for personal, social and emotional development, and the quality of what they are offering is very variable. […] There needs to be a better understanding of what good quality PSHE materials or teaching and learning looks like. We know that's important. But what we also know is that because of budget constraints and also a lack of people working in this area, it's very difficult for schools to provide. […] The demand for really high-quality support on*

[19] Most interviews were held prior to the governments' announcement of the curriculum and assessment review.

relationships, etcetera, is high, but that support is very limited'. (Education system/policy stakeholder)

'We need to know about sex. We need to know about diseases you catch if you don't do it safely, and how do we do it safely, and how do we take care of each other in it, and what the heck is consent? […] We need to have those brave conversations, and parents have to understand that you want the teacher having that conversation. And here, I would argue we need specialist PSHE teachers because a maths teacher is not the person to have that conversation'. (Education senior leader)

Interviewees also acknowledged particular sensitivities relating to this aspect of the curriculum among some communities and highlighted the need for consideration to be shown towards parents' attitudes towards sex and sexuality education. Some interviewees described having worked successfully to dispel parental concerns by communicating with parents openly and with cultural sensitivity about the RSE being delivered at their children's school.

'Practically, to keep kids in school, I think it's really important to proactively engage parents in what is happening in sex education. Because I think there's a lot of fear, unfounded fear. […Some parents] just don't know what is taught. […] They should know just this basic information. I think it really goes a really long way'. (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Finally, interviewees discussed a view of the national curriculum as **overly narrow and insufficiently inclusive**, which in turn contributes to disengagement from education. Some felt the curriculum gives insufficient priority to creative or technical subjects. Some raised concerns that the curriculum does not adequately reflect or incorporate the diversity of cultures and backgrounds of pupils who are expected to engage with it. These interviewees expressed the view that, as a result, some pupils are more likely than others to feel disengaged from learning and more likely to express this through non-attendance or disruptive behaviour.

'The curriculum was becoming more and more narrow because there was this overemphasis on results within a very narrow range of subjects. […] Now, immediately that disenfranchises or demotivates a range of students who would then vote with their feet and they don't turn up'. (Education senior leader)

It is worth noting that the Curriculum and Assessment Review currently underway in England specifically aims to address both of these issues. As noted in Chapter 1 of this report, the stated aims of the review include delivering a broader curriculum so pupils can access music, art, drama and vocational subjects and a curriculum that 'reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented'. Our interview findings provide some support for these changes.

By contrast, interviewees with experience of the education system in Wales were far more positive about the new Curriculum for Wales. Further information is provided in the Box below.

Figure 9: Perspectives on Curriculum for Wales

Interviewees welcomed the new Curriculum for Wales, which provides a more decentralised and flexible framework than its predecessor. They describe the new curriculum as enabling teaching to foster the development of a broad set of skills and knowledge and as enabling schools to support children's holistic development, with a focus on developing creativity, confidence and citizenship. Interviewees explained that making changes to the curriculum could lead to challenges – in particular, teachers needing to develop new knowledge and skills and adapt to new ways of working – but, overall, viewed these as worth overcoming.

Comparing curricula in England and Wales, Power and Taylor (2024a) suggest that Welsh curriculum reforms promote more progressive pedagogies (rather than pursuing more traditional approaches to teaching and learning) while also giving practitioners greater influence on the development of education practice.

The literature suggests, however, that some academics and practitioners have concerns that the Curriculum for Wales has too limited a focus on imparting knowledge, which may risk widening the gap in outcomes between pupils from advantaged and more deprived backgrounds (Power et al., 2020).

3.8. How schools are held to account in England can create challenges for the delivery of effective practices to prevent violence

Twenty-one interviewees described ways in which the systems for holding schools to account influence and constrain schools' abilities to deliver effective practices to prevent violence.

While the use of Progress 8 in England as a key performance measure was viewed as preferable to focusing more narrowly on attainment, the centrality of Progress 8 results to overall judgements of school performance was viewed as problematic. **The weighting of certain academic subjects in Progress 8 was felt to have narrowed the focus of teaching away from other subjects that may be more engaging for some pupils**. Similar concerns are found in the literature (Cole et al., 2019).

> *'The curriculum has become very, very narrow, very, very restricted, I think, as we've seen a narrowing of the lens of what success looks like. Having high aspirations and supporting children to dare to dream and to have ambition is absolutely [important]. But I think it's [currently] through a very narrowed lens of what onward destinations might look like for kids. We've built a system that is about a fistful of "A*s" and the university pathway, and what we're seeing, I think, is that more and more children feel that that isn't relevant to them. I feel like it has really sucked the life out of lots of settings, and the craft of teaching has been deskilled and narrowed under a really bloated heavy weighted curriculum and high stakes testing and continuous assessment and evaluation'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Interviewees explained that **schools feel pressure to focus limited resources on the academic subjects that contribute most to this performance measure**, leading to the deprioritisation and defunding of nonacademic subjects and of lessons and other activities focused on developing children's social-emotional skills and building relationships with trusted adults. The DfE reported that in 2022/23, 64% of teaching hours in secondary schools were spent on English Baccalaureate subjects, representing a 10% increase since 2011/12 (DfE, 2024r).[20]

Interviewees also explained that the **centrality of Progress 8 within Ofsted judgements contributed to perverse incentives for schools to off-roll or exclude pupils** who are not performing well academically.

> *'The definition of success for a school is heavily weighted around performance in GCSEs, and that's definitely the top priority. If that's the priority, that's going to drive the behaviour of teaching staff and school policy to achieve success in that way'.* (Education practitioner)

Relatedly, interviewees said they were aware of schools where, they believed, pressure from Ofsted inspections led to off-rolling and exclusions of children who were persistently absent or engaged in disruptive behaviour, as schools aim to maintain favourable performance metrics and Ofsted ratings.

> *'You're going to have a much easier time if you haven't got kids who are very disruptive kids or who are affecting your attendance figures'.* (Education senior leader)

Our interviewees – speaking before the recently announced changes in Ofsted's processes – expressed considerable concerns about how Ofsted conducts and reports inspections. (See Chapter 1 for a summary of the announced changes.) Interviewees expressed significant concerns about the impact of Ofsted inspections and judgements on the mental health of school staff. Interviewees also criticised the use of single-word judgments for being overly simplistic and not reflective of the complexities schools face, calling for changes in the metrics used by Ofsted in England. Overall, interviewees suggested a **need for inspections to place a higher priority on understanding the contexts of different schools and the variety of challenges** they face, as well as on rewarding inclusive practice.

> *'I think the main thing is that we need to find a way for Ofsted to take account of the wider challenges facing schools, and that's not about making excuses, and it's not about 'the soft bigotry of low expectations'. It's actually recognising the school. Some schools face very, very different challenges to others, and unless we do recognise*

[20] The English Baccalaureate consists of the following GCSE subjects: English language and literature, maths, the sciences, geography or history, and a language.

that, we're going to end up widening the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers'. (Education system/policy stakeholder)

In comparison, interviewees with experience of the education system in Wales were far more positive about the ways in which schools in Wales are held to account by Estyn. Further information is provided in the Box below.

Figure 10: Perspectives on Estyn

Interviewees (including some with experience of school inspections in both England and Wales) generally talked in much more positive terms about the Welsh inspectorate, compared to Ofsted.

Interviewees felt that reflecting the holistic focus of Curriculum for Wales, Estyn's approach benefits from a broad focus on holistic evaluation of extra-curricular activities, child development, and pupil's wellbeing, creativity, confidence and social and emotional skills. (By contrast, while Ofsted's Inspection Framework does include an assessment of pupils' 'resilience, confidence and independence', interviewees criticised the centrality of Progress 8 within Ofsted judgements.)

Interviewees also expressed positive views about Estyn's use of diverse evidence sources for school evaluation, including parent and pupil questionnaires, meetings with various stakeholders, lesson observations and work reviews. This triangulation of data was thought to help Estyn form an accurate and holistic picture of the school's performance. (Again, while Ofsted also collects data from diverse sources, interviewees expressed the view that Progress 8 scores take the highest priority.)

Interviewees described Estyn as taking a supportive and inclusive approach to inspection that is cognisant of the need to safeguard staff mental health. (Ofsted's response to the Big Listen included the introduction of training intended to 'build inspectors' mental health awareness and make sure they know how to embed this in inspection practice' [Ofsted, 2024a].)

Interviewees welcomed the absence of one-word judgements in Estyn's assessments, which they felt encouraged a more nuanced understanding of school performance. (Estyn removed one-word judgements as of 2022, while Ofsted announced their removal in September 2024, following the end of our interview fieldwork.)

Interviewees welcomed Estyn's consistent involvement of school leaders as peer inspectors with a focus on understanding the context and progress of the school, which was viewed favourably for both improving the inspection process and providing professional development opportunities. (While Ofsted does contract inspectors who are experienced education practitioners, this was not raised by interviewees.)

Interviewees acknowledged room for improvement regarding the Estyn inspection framework, with the need for ongoing adjustments to ensure schools are well supported, but overall views of the inspectorate were notably positive.

3.9. Staff in schools do not always have the right training or skills

Thirty-one interviewees reflected that people working in schools are not always equipped with the training or skills needed to carry out good practices that can help to prevent children's involvement in violence.

Interviewees raised the concern that many staff, particularly in mainstream schools, do not feel confident in their skills to support children with high needs to stay in school, build trusted relationships and develop social and emotional skills. **Important skills gaps were identified around understanding and supporting children with SEN and experience of AP and PRU settings, evidence-based approaches to managing children's behaviour and developing their social and emotional skills, and anti-racist teaching practices**.

These skills gaps were attributed to a lack of adequate focus on these areas in ITT and continuing professional development (CPD) for school staff.

Limited training on and understanding of SEN was viewed as leaving some teachers in mainstream schools feeling unprepared to identify and provide effective support to children with additional needs, which in turn may be linked to the disproportionately high numbers of children with SEN being excluded and entering AP and PRU settings. The SEND and AP plan similarly notes that there is a need to improve capacity, expertise and confidence to identify and provide support to pupils with SEN within mainstream schools (DfE, 2023b).

> *'I have a child with special needs. He does go to a specialist provision […] I would give anything for him to stay in a mainstream school in our local community, but there isn't one that is able to meet his needs; [they are] not resourced to be able to meet his [needs]. […] Mainstream [schools] need to be given […] guidance to be more inclusive; they need up-skilling'.* (Education practitioner)

There was also concern that **training on evidence-based approaches to behaviour management strategies is limited.** Interviewees reflected that there is an urgent need for greater focus on understanding children's behaviour and what behaviour – including disruptive behaviour or conflictual behaviour – may communicate or express about children's additional needs, including trauma and adverse childhood experiences. As a result, interviewees felt there were particular gaps in teachers' abilities to implement effective behaviour management strategies that support better behaviour and the development of social and emotional skills, such as emotional regulation, relationship building and conflict resolution. These gaps, in turn, were viewed as contributing to decisions to suspend and exclude children, where schools feel unable to manage pupils' behaviour and uphold the safety of the classroom and school environment. Similar issues have been identified in the

literature (Centre for Social Justice, 2023; Daly et al., 2023; Education Policy Institute, 2024b; Graham et al., 2019).

In addition, interviewees noted that **specific training on developing children's social and emotional skills is limited**. A guidance report from the EEF and the Early Intervention Foundation (2019) on improving social and emotional learning in primary schools found that teachers 'often receive little or no training in how to promote these skills and report limited confidence in their ability to respond to students' emotional, social and behavioural needs'.

> *'I was a mainstream secondary school teacher, and I had become increasingly concerned about the levels of interpersonal conflict between students in classes and aware that my formal teacher training hadn't given me the skills to address those things in an appropriate way'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

In addition, some interviewees explained that having a largely white and middle-class workforce in schools and **limited provision of anti-racism training** could sometimes raise challenges for engaging well with more diverse pupil cohorts and families, cautioning that this heightens the risk of practice and decision-making being influenced by unconscious bias, or by a lack of cultural sensitivity and competence.

Interviewees also noted that the **skills of the school workforce had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and its disruption of CPD opportunities**. Some interviewees felt this had affected the quality of teaching and the ability of teachers to address pupils' social and emotional needs. The provision of CPD to school staff was also viewed as being negatively affected by schools' stretched budgets.

3.10. Schools struggle to recruit and retain staff, constraining their ability to provide consistent practice and continuity of support

Twenty-five interviewees reflected that many schools face **significant difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, which can make it more difficult for schools to build trusting relationships with pupils over time and deliver continuity of support and consistent practice** to help keep them in school and develop social and emotional skills. A DfE analysis (2024r) reports a declining number of new teachers, an increase of 20% in the number of teacher vacancies between 2022 and 2023, and an increasing number of teachers leaving the state-funded sector, including one in 10 of all qualified teachers in 2022/23 and 2021/22.

Regarding non-teaching staff, such as youth workers, speech and language therapists, and mental health counsellors, interviewees highlighted **workforce shortages affecting schools' abilities to recruit these roles**, attributing this to austerity measures that led to stretched resources for the youth sector and health and other support services. Additional challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified youth workers were raised, including low salaries, perceptions of these roles as 'stepping stones' rather than long-term positions and the requirements to have achieved qualifications or to spend time volunteering as a route into

youth work, which are prohibiting people from entering the profession, thereby reducing the pipeline of youth work professionals. Burnout among youth workers was also viewed as related to a lack of consistent, structured supervision and support systems available within some other professions.

Recruitment challenges and high turnover rates among teaching staff, non-teaching staff and senior leaders were attributed by interviewees to pay, conditions and pressures on staff leading to burnout. It was noted that schools often offer less competitive salaries to graduates than other employers. This reflects an analysis that found teachers' earnings are persistently lower than those in comparator professions (Incomes Data Research, 2019).

> *'If you're a graduate, you can very quickly earn more than you're going to earn in teaching by going elsewhere'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Rural schools, AP and PRUs, and special education settings may face additional difficulties in attracting and retaining staff due to geographic isolation and the demanding nature of the work. High levels of burnout among teachers are recognised in the literature, and burnout is one of the strongest predictors of teachers' intentions to leave the profession (Madigan, 2021; 2023). School staff burnout was attributed by interviewees to high workloads, the emotional strain of supporting children and a lack of sufficient support systems and professional development opportunities, which contribute to staff feeling undervalued and overburdened. Additional pressures on staff in England were attributed to Ofsted and school inspection practices, including high-stakes school visits and the (now defunct) one-word judgements.

3.11. Specific challenges impede the achievement of racially equitable practices and outcomes

Nineteen interviewees discussed concerns that limited understanding of intersectional inequalities, a lack of cultural competence, unconscious bias and structural racism present additional challenges for delivering good practice to reduce children's involvement in violence and particularly for providing effective, equitable support for children from minoritised ethnicities.

As discussed in the previous chapter, DfE data demonstrate that rates of suspension and exclusion are patterned by ethnicity. Some interviewees felt this could be explained in part by **structural racism and unconscious bias**. The **adultification of Black children**, whereby Black children are expected to have higher levels of emotional regulation than is age-appropriate, was identified as a concern that contributes to disproportionate exclusion rates for Black Caribbean children. As well as age-inappropriate expectations, findings from the literature suggest 'low expectations of teachers as a contributing factor to higher school exclusion of Black [Caribbean] children' (Demie, 2022).

Interviewees also cautioned that **in the context of a predominantly middle-class and white school workforce, ensuring all staff have the knowledge and skills to deliver culturally competent and/or sensitive practice in schools is challenging**. DfE data suggest that 16.2% of teachers in 2022/23 in England identified as belonging to a minoritised ethnic group, with a disproportionately low number of teachers identifying as Asian, Asian British, Black or Black British compared to the working age population (DfE, 2024r).[21] That disproportionality is even more pronounced in leadership positions.[22] Evidence from the literature suggests that having more Black role models in schools can make a difference in the outcomes, including exclusions, of Black boys (Stewart-Hall et al., 2023).

Additional difficulties raised by interviewees for tackling disparities include that issues of racism are not well understood, and school staff may struggle to engage with learning about them or understand the importance of doing so.

> *'As a country, we're not very good at talking about race or engaging with it. In many communities around the country, the perception is that the group performing least well is the White working class. So, there's a reluctance to really lean into the realities of racial disparities when people's experiences often suggest that it's the White British kids who are doing least well. I don't think people are well-educated around this issue, and there's a lot of complacency about the idea that we don't have a racist system'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Some interviewees cautioned that **in schools that do not implement explicitly anti-racist approaches, children of minoritised ethnicities will be less likely to feel safe and remain engaged in school**. Some emphasised that teaching and support for children need to be considered through an intersectional lens that acknowledges the influence of racism and other forms of disadvantage on children's identities and outcomes of experiences.

Interviewees suggested that whole-school action was needed to address these challenges, with training and support for all school staff. Similarly, a critical review of strategies to prevent school exclusions of Black children in England called for 'investment in anti-racist practice and professional learning for staff' to enable staff to 'become cognizant of their own racial biases and become racially literate' (Ibid.).

> *'I really hope that there is a uniform expectation that schools will engage with race equality because I think that would make a significant difference. I work with a lot of schools that are really trying to do the work, but it needs everyone. If every school understood that by working on race equality and upskilling their staff, it would*

[21] In 2022/23, 2.7% of teachers identified as Black or Black British, compared to 4.4% of the working age population as identified in the 2021 Census. In 2022/23, 5.5% of teachers identified as Asian or Asian British, compared to 10.1% of the working age population as identified in the 2021 Census.

[22] In 2023/24, 15.9% of White British, 11.1% of White Minorities, 10.0% of Black or Black British and 8.3% of Asian or Asian British teachers were in leadership positions.

ultimately impact their exclusions, persistent absenteeism and the number of pupils choosing—or feeling forced—to be electively home educated'. (Education system/policy stakeholder)

As discussed above, interviewees also expressed the view that the **curriculum in England needs revision to incorporate and reflect the diversity of pupils and wider society**. (It should be noted that this is one of the stated aims of the current curriculum and assessment review.) Conversely, interviewees from Wales were supportive of action to address systemic racism within the education system in Wales, citing the national Anti-Racist Action Plan and changes to the curriculum as positive steps forward.

'Our professional learning focuses on anti-racism in education, considering it in the context of culture, curriculum, policy and the wider business of education, childcare and play. Children can't be emotionally or physically safe when racism is still prevalent in their lives. It's really important that we explore this issue to ensure that practitioners, educators and leaders are confident in how they tackle racism as part of their safeguarding business, living and breathing that every day. It might be about being proactive in handling and stamping out racist incidents, but it's also about creating an anti-racist culture and curriculum so that everyone feels represented, safe and has a sense of belonging. Without that, there's always going to be an emotional or physical impact on children'. (Education system/policy stakeholder)

3.12. School behaviour policies that do not place adequate focus on identifying and addressing pupils' underlying needs may create barriers to good practice that reduce children's involvement in violence

Thirty interviewees suggested that **some school behaviour policies may make it harder for schools to enact good practices to keep vulnerable children safe from violence**, including keeping them in education, providing trusted adults and developing social and emotional skills.

Guidance from the EEF on evidence-based approaches to improving behaviour in schools notes that effective responses to behavioural concerns need to be informed by an understanding of pupils' influences, contexts and needs (EEF, 2019). The guidance cautions that the use of default responses (such as automatically removing any pupil engaging in disruptive behaviour from the classroom) may be less effective than tailoring behaviour management approaches to individual pupils' contexts and needs. It also suggests that in the case of 'pupils who need more intensive support with their behaviour, a personalised approach is recommended'. It further notes that 'interventions found to have a positive effect on behaviour largely focused on positive responses to the challenge of misbehaviour – training teachers to positively encourage learning behaviours and putting in place reward systems – rather than primarily focusing on punitive measures'.

Interviewees expressed the view that **highly prescriptive school behaviour policies that set defined responses to particular behaviours may not leave sufficient room for identifying and addressing underlying needs and supporting social and emotional development or behavioural change**. Interviewees emphasised the need to maintain high standards and expectations of children while seeking to understand children's individual contexts, needs and the reasons that lie behind disruptive or other behaviours that are at odds with school policy.

> *'I had a discussion with the Headmaster a couple of weeks ago, and one of our students had been excluded from school for stealing. Any stealing is automatically a temporary exclusion. [I asked,] "What's he done?" "He's stolen an apple from the school canteen". And I said, "Do you know why he's stolen an apple; does that seem relevant?" […] The reason he stole it is because [he does not have] enough money at home to feed the family, and he's worried because he thinks his mum isn't eating […] He's seven. He's stolen an apple for his mother, and he's [been] excluded. And, of course, for those two days, he is now at home not getting the free school meal that he's entitled to'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Some interviewees drew upon neuroscience and child development theories to explain that disciplinary responses to behaviour that are not accompanied by adequate support are generally ineffective in bringing about long-term, sustainable behaviour change.

There was also a concern that school behaviour policies that mandate, without exception, removal from the classroom, isolation, suspensions or exclusions for certain behaviours or sending children home if they arrive at school late or without the right uniform or equipment **may lead to an unnecessary loss of education.** Inasmuch as the implementation of default responses leads to an increase in suspensions and exclusions, there was a concern that this may also thereby **increase strain on the AP and PRU systems**.

Relatedly, interviewees expressed the view that while school behaviour policies that rely on default responses to disruptive behaviour may work for some children, they are least appropriate and could be counterproductive for some of the most disadvantaged children. There was a particular concern that **some children, including those with SEN or those who have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences, such as those living in households with conflict or violence, are disproportionately likely to face disciplinary action** (including being removed from the classroom, put into isolation, suspended or excluded) when this is the default response to disruption. Interviewees noted that a more effective response, from the perspective of violence prevention, might often be to keep the pupil in school and provide support to address needs.

> *'The cause behind the [disruptive] behaviour is, we know from studying trauma, trauma-informed approaches and adverse childhood experiences, that [these children's] brains develop differently and what they need is safety and belonging. Why are we creating isolation and making them feel more unsafe coming to school?'* (Education practitioner)

A final concern was that, by requiring school staff to respond in prescribed and codified ways to particular behaviours, the use of default responses **risks deskilling or de-professionalising the education workforce** and constrains opportunities for staff to exercise curiosity, compassion and appropriate flexibility within their behaviour management practices.

Overall, **interviewees were in favour of balanced approaches** that maintain discipline, high expectations of children, healthy boundaries and a calm learning environment while keeping a focus on understanding individual contexts and providing effective, tailored support to address underlying needs.

> *'We've seen everything from zero-tolerance behaviour policies to [schools] that are just so inclusive that, actually, they're not setting the right standards for children and young people. And both are kind of cruel in different ways if you ask me. Because one is not setting the right standards nor enabling children to succeed, but the other is giving them no chance to succeed in that environment because, at the first sign of trouble, they'll be out. You don't do children any favours by not setting strong standards of discipline, but it's also cruel to continue to punish a child for not being able to meet the standard when they need support to get there. The best schools are balancing very, very strong discipline with the ability to understand and meet the needs within their cohort and realise it's a bit of both'.* (Education practitioner)

3.13. Some schools are unfamiliar with guidance on what works to prevent children's involvement in violence

Limited awareness among schools of what works to reduce violence among children was identified by 20 interviewees as a key challenge preventing schools from implementing effective practices. Interviewees discussed that schools often do not know which approaches have the best evidence of effectiveness and should, therefore, be prioritised in school spending decisions.

> *'Whether it's mentoring or counselling or workshops, schools are receiving all these offers from well-meaning charities, community interest companies, private companies. But the schools have got no sense of actually what works here, what intervention is going to have an impact. People are [a] bit reluctant to acknowledge the fact there are lots of […] organisations out there pertaining to offer solutions that have no grounding in evidence at all. That's something we need to tackle'. (*Education system/policy stakeholder)

Relatedly, interviewees noted **gaps in the evidence base, coupled with a lack of awareness in schools of the evidence that does exist regarding the school-based practices and interventions that work best to prevent violence**. There was a perception of particularly important gaps in the evidence base around effective behaviour policies; how to tackle racism in schools and deliver anti-racist, inclusive education, including for traveller children; how to embed effective trauma-responsive practices; and how to deliver interventions to meet children's speech, language and communication needs. As a result, interviewees described an

overreliance on anecdotal information when designing school policy and practice around behaviour or other issues.

> *'I think it also comes back to a lack of investment in understanding what works. […] With behaviour, there isn't a clear, universally accepted model or "bible" text. There are quite contrasting views. So, there isn't a sufficiently strong mental model for thinking about behaviour and how to improve it at various levels: classroom, pastoral, senior leadership and intervention'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Interviewees also reflected that it was **not easy to share evidence on good practice** between schools and LAs, leading to isolated pockets of good practice rather than widespread adoption.

Relatedly, reports by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) suggest that there is **limited age-specific guidance from the government on how best to support children who are experiencing or at risk of exclusion,** including alternative support schools could provide instead of making exclusions. The Ofsted and CQC (2024b) thematic review of AP flagged the lack of guidance setting out the types of AP placement that can be helpful and potential indicators of success. The literature also suggests there is limited information available for pupils' families around exclusions, managed moves and AP, including what their rights are and how to appeal decisions (Ofsted and CQC, 2024b; Daly et al., 2023).

These findings suggest there is a need to ensure national guidance on supporting vulnerable children is strengthened, to ensure schools are made aware of YEF guidance on effective, evidence-based practices that schools can deliver to reduce children's involvement in violence, to continue growing the evidence base and to ensure guidance is updated as new evidence emerges.

3.14. Schools struggle to use pupil data to inform the delivery of effective and equitable violence prevention practice

Eleven interviewees reported that schools can struggle to capture, analyse and use data on their pupils' needs and outcomes to inform practice.

In particular, **gaps were identified in data** on pupils' educational needs, outcomes (including suspensions, exclusions and outcomes of interventions), reasons for absence and experiences in school-commissioned AP and PRUs.

> *'The lack of proper data collection is a significant issue here. It's really poor across lots of different areas, and without the data, you can't make informed changes or say that something's not working. [Schools] rely on anecdotal evidence instead of data. […] Data would help shape, monitor and assess the success of different policies and interventions'.* (Education system/policy stakeholder)

Interviewees explained that schools do not always analyse the data they have available in ways that help them to understand issues or to make informed decisions about which interventions would help their cohorts. Where schools do not disaggregate and analyse their data by ethnicity, SEN, eligibility for FSM and other demographic factors, this limits the identification of disparities and hinders the development of targeted interventions.

Interviewees cited additional challenges around data sharing with external services, including a lack of clarity about which data can and cannot be shared under GDPR. Uncertainty about data protection requirements can lead schools to be overly cautious about requesting and sharing information about children, which could be used to better understand children's needs and the risks they are facing. Information sharing at times of transition (e.g. between KSs or schools) was highlighted, both in interviews and in a report by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020, p.21), as a particular challenge that makes supporting children more difficult.

3.15. Conclusion

Our research identified that schools are facing a range of barriers to the delivery of effective practices to prevent violence. While children and families are presenting with increasingly severe and complex needs, the absence of a well-functioning ecosystem of local support services means that many mainstream schools and AP and PRU settings are under increasing pressure to fill gaps in support. The extent to which they are able to do this, however, is acutely constrained by the financial pressures under which they operate, with many schools experiencing budget deficits. Coordinating support across the different school types in England was also seen as a challenge in some areas, while AP and PRU settings in both England and Wales face a range of additional pressures compared to their mainstream counterparts. In England, the national curriculum and systems for holding schools accountable were identified as unhelpful for efforts to deliver inclusive practices for vulnerable children (though the recently announced curriculum review and reforms to Ofsted present valuable opportunities to address these issues). Across England and Wales, school staff do not always have the training and skills they need to deliver effective practice to prevent violence, while challenges with recruitment and retention in the sector constrain schools' abilities to provide consistent practice and continuity of support. Particular challenges inhibit the delivery of inclusive, equitable practice to support children of minoritised ethnicities and overcome disparities in outcomes. At the school level, certain behaviour policies in some schools may constrain their abilities to keep children in education, and there remains an urgent need to ensure all schools have access to evidence-based guidance and the pupil data they need to support the delivery of effective practices to prevent and reduce violence.

4. Policy implications: changes to education policy and systems that would help more education settings deliver practice that reduces children's involvement in violence

4.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses our fifth and sixth research questions:

- **What specific policy and system changes would help ensure more education settings are able to deliver good (effective and/or racially equitable and inclusive) practice regarding violence prevention (particularly keeping children in education, supporting suspended and excluded children, providing children with trusted adults, and developing children's social and emotional skills)?**

- **How do these policy and system changes differ in England and Wales?**

Having set out the current policy and system context in which schools operate and examined the central policy and system-level challenges constraining schools' abilities to deliver effective practice to prevent violence, we turn to a discussion of the changes that our evidence suggests would help support more consistent and widespread delivery of good practice.

Each of these suggested changes was developed through the process set out in the methodology section of this report. The research team developed initial suggestions for policy and system change based on our analysis of evidence from interviews and the literature and then took these through the Delphi consultation process to test, validate and refine them in collaboration with education sector stakeholders.

For each of our five policy implications, we set out the suggested change, its rationale and any additional considerations we think are important to inform implementation.

Further information on the changes to wording we made during the consultation process and survey results showing Delphi participants' views on the feasibility, desirability, effectiveness and prioritisation of each suggested change is set out in Annex 1 of this report.

For the sake of brevity, in our discussion of policy implications, we use the term AP to describe both AP and PRU settings.

4.2. Policy Implication 1: establish a new Pastoral Premium grant for pupils with the greatest vulnerability to the risk of involvement in violence to help schools keep them safe

4.2.1. Policy Implication 1

1.1 **A Pastoral Premium grant should be established to be distributed directly to and used by schools for the purpose of keeping children safe from violence and harm**. This should be in addition to the existing Pupil Premium in England and PDG in Wales, both of which focus on improving educational outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils rather than safety.

1.2 The **amount of funding schools receive should be calculated on the basis of the number of pupils on roll who meet eligibility criteria**. Eligibility could include (a) pupils who receive Pupil Premium or PDG, (b) pupils registered as receiving SEN support or an EHC plan and (c) pupils with a history of persistent absence, suspension or exclusion. In addition, schools should have a degree of discretion to add pupils to the Pastoral Premium register if they can show the pupil has increased vulnerability to the risk of involvement in violence but does not fall into the above categories (e.g. if they have an older sibling involved in violent offending). All AP schools should receive funding for all pupils on roll.

1.3 Similarly to the Pupil Premium and the PDG, **schools should be required to spend the Pastoral Premium grant on activities from a menu** of approaches, all of which have robust evidence showing that they can help keep children safe from violence and harm. The menu of activities should initially be based on the YEF's (2024b) evidence-based guidance on what works to keep children in education, provide trusted adults and support the development of social and emotional skills. These activities should include both whole-school interventions and targeted interventions, with schools required to spend at least some of the funding on whole-school approaches. Currently, evidence-based activities in the YEF guidance include employing mentors and therapists to provide one-to-one support, providing after-school sports or other enrichment activities with trained mentors, providing high-quality relationship violence reduction sessions and working with parents/carers to support attendance.

1.4 Activities could be **commissioned/procured from external providers or delivered by appropriately skilled school staff**. Alongside the menu of activities, the DfE should publish detailed guidance, informed by YEF evidence, to support schools in assessing the needs of their pupils and then selecting and commissioning/procuring evidence-based activities that meet the needs of their pupils, with case studies and illustrative examples.

1.5 The DfE, supported by YEF, should hold overall accountability for **ensuring the menu of activities and accompanying guidance are kept updated** as new evidence of effective and ineffective approaches emerges.

1.6 **Schools should be held to account for how they use the Pastoral Premium** in ways similar to the Pupil Premium by requirements to publish a statement explaining its use annually, scrutiny of governors/trustees and inspection by Ofsted and Estyn.

4.2.2. Policy Implication 1 rationale

Rationale for proposing additional funding using eligibility criteria

- Inadequate funding was a challenge discussed by almost all interviewees with reference to policy and system features that stopped more schools from carrying out good practices to prevent children's involvement in violence.
- When asked what could help make more schools/settings able to carry out good practices around violence prevention, many interviewees explained that more funding to schools was needed without specifying how this could be put in place. A few others suggested that changes in how existing funding systems in SEN and AP would help and that longer-term funding to schools was needed.
- To ensure that the policy implication remained specific to the goal of this study and that funding is targeted in proportion to need, we steered away from proposing changes to how general school funding worked.
- We decided to consider a Pastoral Premium after consultation with the YEF. We used existing evidence from the DfE and YEF about who was at risk to determine eligibility criteria, which were further discussed with Delphi participants.[23]

Rationale for proposing a menu of interventions

- A lack of awareness in schools about evidence of what works was a challenge discussed by some interviewees. Schools may not always understand which approaches to spend their limited funds on (which may lead to some using approaches that have been found to be ineffective or counterproductive).

[23] The YEF's second annual report into young people's experiences of violence found that young people who regularly missed education, received FSM, attended a PRU or were from households most affected by cost-of-living pressures were more likely to have engaged in violent behaviour or been a victim of violence. The DfE's descriptive statistics looking at the education and children's social care background of children who had been cautioned or sentenced for an offence identified higher rates for children who had been permanently excluded, attended AP, had SEN or been persistently absent (YEF, 2023a; DfE, 2022c).

- We, therefore, wanted to design the policy implication to ensure that additional funding would be spent on evidence-based measures. The menu of evidence-based interventions provides a mechanism through which the policy evidence base can be leveraged to overcome knowledge gaps.

Rationale for proposing accountability measures

- To ensure the funding is spent effectively, existing systems of school accountability should be leveraged to provide oversight of the Pastoral Premium.

- Delphi participants emphasised that ensuring adequate oversight would be central to bolstering its effectiveness.

4.2.3. Additional considerations for implementation of Policy Implication 1

Delphi participants identified some additional **risks or caveats** around Policy Implication 1, which could inform future implementation:

- There is a risk that **limited capacity in schools to deliver and commission activities and local services to deliver activities** may reduce the feasibility of effective implementation of this change.

- There is a risk of **adding a management burden on schools**. School funding is already fragmented. Managing the Pastoral Premium could be challenging for some (and especially smaller) schools. (To mitigate this risk, some suggested expanding the Pupil Premium and PDG instead of introducing a new grant: eligibility criteria could be expanded to include pupils registered as receiving SEN support or an EHC plan and pupils with a history of persistent absence, suspension or exclusion, while the activities on which the funding can be spent could be expanded to include activities with robust evidence showing that they can help keep children safe from violence and harm. Others suggested that providing schools with funding to manage the coordination of the Pastoral Premium would be beneficial.)

- There is a risk that if individual children are eligible for funding, this **may lead to unintended consequences such as stigmatisation of children**. However, participants also recognised that receiving additional funding connected to eligible children could help support the understanding of their vulnerabilities and incentivise keeping them in school. To mitigate this risk, narratives around the Pastoral Premium used in public discourse should frame it in a way that uses asset-based language to emphasise its value in promoting children's safety and inclusion.

- There is a risk that if schools have a degree of discretion to add pupils who do not meet core criteria to the Pastoral Premium register, this could increase the cost and

complexity and reduce the feasibility of the policy. The details of the design of this element of the policy would need additional consideration.

4.3. Policy Implication 2: use cross-government funding to implement 'hubs' based in schools, with co-located workers from local support services and organisations working together to support children

4.3.1. Policy Implication 2

2.1 **At least one school in each local area should be designated to act as a hub**. The aim of the hub is to help education settings, local services and local organisations better support children at risk of involvement in violence by facilitating information- and best practice-sharing and coordinating support.

2.2 **The initial set-up of each hub should begin with a scoping exercise** conducted by local partnerships and following guidance to be developed by national governments to identify what is needed from the local hub. This could include making recommendations about the school in which the hub should be based, which organisations should become members of the hub and which organisation should hold overall responsibility for its operations (this could be the LA or a local MAT, for example).

2.3 **Hub members** could include other education settings (including local mainstream, special and AP schools and other AP used locally), local services (children's social care, health, mental health, speech and language therapy, youth justice, youth work, housing support and benefits services) and local third sector organisations that support children (youth clubs and charities).

2.4 **Cross-government funding** should provide (a) a hub coordinator, with the role of coordinating the support services and facilitating multi-agency working, who is based in the hub school and (b) funding to each service/organisation participating in the hub to support partnership working.

2.5 **Hub members should be co-located in the school** for at least part of their time and work together in partnership to share information about children, support safeguarding and interventions, brainstorm solutions and deliver coordinated support in liaison and collaboration with parents and carers. Part of the role of hub professionals should be to upskill each other in their areas of expertise.

2.6 **Managerial responsibilities** for individuals employed by external services but co-located in the hub (including performance, professional development and human resources) should remain with their home service/organisation (and not with the school). Ofsted and Estyn should be responsible for holding schools to account for

work engaging in the hub but will not be responsible for holding other organisations involved in the hub to account.

2.7 **Detailed guidance** should be developed by national governments to support the initial set-up and ongoing implementation of the hubs, drawing on lessons learned from other multi-agency hubs programmes (including the APST, the SAFE Taskforces, teaching school hubs and others). This guidance should be based on further research into what works when facilitating multi-agency working in schools. This should include guidance on composition, governance and expectations, an adaptable template for terms of reference, and sharing data between multi-agency partners.

4.3.2. Policy Implication 2 rationale

Rationale for proposing a hub based in a school

- Interviewees identified that a lack of capacity among external agencies means that external agencies struggle to provide coordinated and timely support to children and that schools struggle to work with them to support children.
- As a result, schools increasingly feel the need to support children more but struggle without dedicated funding or relevant expertise.
- When asked what could help address this challenge, many interviewees suggested that external agencies should spend more time in schools.
- Interviewees felt that this could encourage information sharing and collaboration between schools and external agencies and upskill school staff. Ultimately, this could reduce pressures on external agencies and ensure earlier intervention for children at risk of involvement in violence.
- Based on this and emerging learning from our ongoing evaluation of the APST programme, we propose a hub that has other agencies co-located in schools.

Rationale for proposing the features of the hub

- We suggest including a range of external partners, including third sector organisations, based on interviewees' suggestions and emerging findings from the evaluation of APST about which partners were important for AP schools.
- Delphi workshop participants suggested that scoping exercises were the best way to determine which partners would be most helpful to include, reflecting that the right partners would depend greatly on the local context and needs.
- We suggest national cross-government funding is allocated to support the hubs, including a dedicated coordinator to organise the hub and dedicated funding for external agencies to take part in the hub. Emerging learning from the evaluation of

APST shows that these were important features that supported the engagement of local agencies in the APST pilot. The project coordinator role was seen as a 'lynchpin' that helped keep busy professionals involved in the hub.

Rationale for determining guidance and accountability

- Based on feedback from Delphi participants, we clarified where responsibilities would sit and that schools would not be responsible for external agencies' performance.
- Based on the discussion with Delphi participants, we suggest that guidance from the government would be needed to guide the design, set-up and implementation of the hubs and that this should draw upon previous examples of relevant hubs and partnership working arrangements.

4.3.3. Additional considerations for implementation of Policy Implication 2

We propose that the implementation of Policy Implication 2 should be **informed by existing relevant evidence and stakeholder consultation**. An evidence review of programmes aiming to encourage partnership working between schools and local agencies and stakeholder consultation to capture learning from unevaluated programmes should be conducted to identify common challenges, enablers and good practice.

There are a number of ways in which these changes could be delivered, from introducing a new funded policy to extending the APST programme (should the results of the impact evaluation prove promising) or utilising funding from the Young Futures programme planned by the new government.

Delphi participants identified some additional **risks and caveats** around this policy implication:

- While Delphi participants considered this policy implication to be the most important to prioritise, they also considered it to be the most challenging to implement because it represents a **system change**.
- **Lack of space for co-location** will be a challenge for many schools.
- There is a risk that **schools and local agencies may lack the capacity to participate meaningfully** in a hub.
- **Feasibility will vary in different local contexts** and be influenced by the quality of existing partnerships and relationships between schools and local agencies.
- **Which schools host hubs may affect potential effectiveness.** Scoping exercises should identify which schools have the greatest need for a hub, bearing in mind that those with strong relationships with local agencies and strong support for pupils may benefit the least from hosting a hub.

4.4. Policy Implication 3: ensure the ongoing review of the national curriculum in England results in an updated curriculum that better supports schools in preventing violence

4.4.1. Policy Implication 3

3.1 The national curriculum in England should give **greater priority to teaching about sex and relationships**, including specific sessions on sexual violence and relationship violence prevention. As in Wales, **sex and relationships should be compulsory subjects in secondary school, with no right to withdraw**. Schools should be required to engage and communicate actively with families to inform them about the sex and relationships curriculum being delivered in their schools and to dispel any concerns. The **DfE should provide detailed guidance to support schools** in doing this, including advice on effective approaches to engagement and adaptable template letters for parents/carers.

3.2 The **national curriculum and assessment should be rebalanced** to give greater priority to the development of social and emotional skills (including, specifically, self-awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness, relationship skills, constructive decision-making and conflict resolution skills). These skills should be embedded across the curriculum so that pupils are provided with opportunities to develop them in lessons for every subject.

3.3 **Requirements made of academies and AP schools** (which do not follow the national curriculum) should also be revised to reflect these changes.

3.4 The ongoing review of the national curriculum should aim to **learn from the experience – including both successes and challenges – of the recent implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales**.

4.4.2. Policy Implication 3 rationale

Rationale for changes to relationships and sex education

- As noted in the YEF practice guidance, relationship violence reduction sessions have been shown to be an effective strategy for reducing children's involvement in violence.
- However, our interviewees and Delphi participants discussed that RSE education in England is highly inconsistent, and many pupils are not being taught effectively.
- Due to the right to withdraw in England, some pupils are being denied any sex education.

- Ineffective teaching or not receiving any teaching on RSE and relationship violence at school leaves pupils at greater risk of harm.

- Some interviewees and Delphi participants also highlighted misconceptions and negative perceptions of RSE within some communities and that schools can struggle to communicate its content and value.

- These interviewees highlighted the need for schools to be supported by clear national guidance and support for effective engagement with parents/carers to inform them about this teaching, address misconceptions and dispel concerns.

Rationale for giving greater weight to the development of social and emotional skills

- The YEF practice guidance makes clear that supporting children's development of social and emotional skills – including through a universal curriculum – helps reduce the risk of involvement in violence, including by enabling children to 'think before they act, understand others' perspectives and manage aggression' (YEF, 2024b).

- Interviewees and Delphi participants raised a number of criticisms of the national curriculum for England, however, and a key concern was that the curriculum has become increasingly focused on knowledge and facts to the detriment of social and emotional skills.

Rationale for making equivalent requirements of academies and alternative provision settings

- While academies and AP are not required to follow the national curriculum, pupils in these settings should be equally able to benefit from the proposed changes.

Rationale for learning from Curriculum for Wales:

- Wales is currently rolling out the Curriculum for Wales. That experience and the outcomes of the roll-out are subject to ongoing research and analysis.

- The experience in Wales highlights that curriculum changes can take time to embed.

- Some concerns have also been expressed by researchers about whether Curriculum for Wales is achieving the right balance of promoting knowledge and skills (or whether skills may have been prioritised to too great a degree, with detrimental consequences for the most disadvantaged).

- Ongoing research on the implementation and outcomes of curriculum changes in Wales provides a valuable evidence base with which England could usefully engage to support learning and application of relevant lessons.

4.4.3. Additional considerations for implementation of Policy Implication 3

We suggest these changes are pursued in the **context of the existing review of the national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England**.

The aims of the curriculum and assessment review currently underway in England specifically state that the review will seek to deliver a broader curriculum, with improved access to music, art and drama, and a curriculum that 'reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented' (DfE, 2024d).

Our research provides some support for these aims (in addition to the changes we suggest in Policy Implication 3). Participants expressed the view that a curriculum that prioritises the promotion of creative skills more highly would also be more engaging, thus further incentivising engagement in education (which, as YEF practice guidance highlights, in turn, acts as an additional protective factor). Evidence reviewed by the EEF (2021) also suggests artistic and creative activities may offer a route for re-engaging older pupils with education. Participants also expressed the view that a curriculum that reflects the diversity of pupils and wider society may help foster engagement in education.

4.5. Policy Implication 4: update initial training and continuing professional development for all school staff to equip them to keep children safe from violence and meet the requirements of the new national curriculum

4.5.1. Policy Implication 4

4.1 Initial training and CPD for all school staff, including teachers of all subjects, Headteachers and other senior leaders, should embed **awareness of** evidence-based approaches to developing pupil's social and emotional skills, understanding and managing behaviour effectively (including understanding pupils and their contexts and tailoring support to pupils' needs), delivering anti-racist practice and preventing bullying.

4.2 Initial training and CPD for all school staff should also include **expanded and strengthened compulsory components on supporting children with SEN and awareness of the role of AP**. Teachers and support staff from AP and those with SEN specialisms should be more involved in delivering this training. Initial training and CPD should include expanded opportunities for placements in and visits to AP and special schools to learn from their practices.

4.3 **All school Governors should also be required to undertake training** on these issues in addition to any existing training requirements.

4.4 Trainers and mentors delivering initial training and CPD to school staff and Governors should themselves receive training on these issues from **established experts**.

4.5.2. Policy Implication 4 rationale

Rationale for topics covered in training

- Our interviewees highlighted that gaps and inconsistencies in the skill sets of school staff were a key challenge for delivering effective practice that prevents violence by keeping children in education, providing trusted adults and supporting the development of social and emotional skills.
- Interviewees and Delphi participants agreed that people working in schools are not always equipped with suitable and adequate training or professional development to develop these skills.
- Particular training gaps were identified around developing pupils' social and emotional skills, managing behaviour effectively (including understanding pupils and their contexts and tailoring support to pupils' needs), delivering anti-racist practice, supporting children with SEN and being aware of the role of AP.
- The existing evidence base on effective practice in these areas could be better leveraged to support the delivery of this training.

Rationale for inclusion of these topics in both initial training and continuing professional development

- Interviewees and Delphi participants suggested that many trainees and newly qualified teachers were entering classrooms without sufficient understanding of these topics, underscoring the importance of strengthening these elements in ITT.
- They also, however, noted that supporting ongoing development in these areas through CPD is at least as important, both to reinforce knowledge and skills acquired in ITT and to ensure that existing staff are included in skills development efforts.

Rationale for who should receive training

- Interviewees and Delphi participants emphasised that it is insufficient for such skills to be concentrated among a small number of staff members in each school. Building a whole-school environment that consistently supports pupils to stay in school, builds trusted relationships and develops social and emotional skills requires all school staff, including teachers and Senior Leaders, to have skills in these areas.
- Delphi participants also raised that just as school staff need the support of Senior Leaders to implement learning (e.g. on relational approaches and conflict resolution) gained through training within their practice, Senior Leaders, in turn, need the understanding and support of school Governors to uphold these approaches.

4.5.3. Additional considerations for implementation of Policy Implication 4

An additional suggestion from our Delphi participants was that it may be worth conducting a more thorough **review of ITT and CPD**. As well as assessing the quality of training across the sector more generally, a review could help to ensure the ITT curriculum expands and strengthens the elements outlined above while remaining manageable.

4.6. Policy Implication 5: ensure upcoming changes by Ofsted include a focus on inclusive, equitable good practice to reduce violence

4.6.1. Policy Implication 5

5.1 Upcoming changes to Ofsted processes and practices should include changes to help incentivise and reward schools that carry out good practices to reduce violence.

5.2 The newly announced **annual reviews of schools' safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling should be extended** to include consideration of schools' use of official and unofficial exclusions and suspensions. The new annual reviews should include a focus on identifying and sharing good practices that help schools prevent children's involvement in violence, drawing on YEF's practice guidance as well as learning from schools.

5.3 The **soon-to-be-revised inspection framework and new School Report Cards should consider pupils' levels of need, vulnerability and disadvantage** in each school (including the number and proportion of pupils with SEN support/EHC plans, socio-economic disadvantage/Pupil Premium/PDG, histories of persistent absence, suspension and exclusion, and pupils registered in AP and PRU settings) and account for schools' differing contexts as the inspectorate assesses the quality of support for vulnerable children. The inspection framework should recognise the challenges faced by schools that serve cohorts with particularly high needs, vulnerabilities and disadvantages and appropriately reward inclusive practice that helps meet these needs.

5.4 Particular attention should be paid during **Ofsted inspections** to whether there is any **disproportionality in school practices and resulting pupil experiences and outcomes** relating to exclusions, suspensions, attendance and off-rolling that negatively affects pupils with high needs, vulnerabilities and disadvantages. The inspectorate should **engage with staff, parents, carers and pupils** to hear their views on these issues. Examination of each of these issues should also be **included in the newly announced School Report Cards**.

5.5 Ofsted and Estyn should **support and incentivise the other policy and system changes we suggest**. If/when the Pastoral Premium is established, both Ofsted and Estyn

should include an assessment of whether the funding is being used by schools effectively and for its intended purposes. If/when the hubs are set up, Ofsted and Estyn should recognise the schools' roles within the hub (without taking on the role of inspecting the work of the hub itself). If/when changes to the national curriculum are established, Ofsted should ensure the inspection framework is updated to reflect the changes and hold schools to account for the quality of education they provide in relationships and sex and in social and emotional skills.

4.6.2. Policy Implication 5 rationale

Rationale for including official and unofficial exclusions and suspensions in annual reviews

- The focus of the newly announced annual reviews on schools' safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling provides a valuable opportunity to develop and share learning on effective approaches to keeping children in education.
- The findings of this review suggest, however, that there is an equally urgent need to review practice and outcomes around official and unofficial exclusions and suspensions, given their importance to keeping children in education.
- This suggests these topics should also be included in the annual reviews to ensure learning on good practice is developed, updated and shared on a regular basis.

Rationale for suggestions about the inspection framework and new School Report Cards

- Ofsted's announcement of plans to incorporate further consideration of issues related to inclusion is welcome. Delphi participants were concerned, however, that changes to the inspection framework and the introduction of School Report Cards should function to incentivise inclusive practice while accounting for differences in schools' contexts and challenges.
- A focus on the level of need among pupils in each school, alongside a focus on disproportionality in pupil outcomes, should help to achieve this and avoid penalising schools serving the highest need cohorts.

Rationale for Ofsted and Estyn supporting other suggested changes

- Delphi participants emphasised that once Policy Implications 1, 2 and 3 have been implemented, the schools inspectorates should play a role in holding schools to account for and supporting the practice required of them. This should help improve the effectiveness of these changes in improving outcomes for pupils.

4.6.3. Additional considerations for implementation of Policy Implication 5

Beyond Ofsted, participants expressed the view that the **regulatory system in England as a whole should move further towards enabling a formative approach to school improvement**. This includes building long-term relationships and collaborative partnerships between regulatory bodies and schools and providing schools with relevant guidance and resources for improvement based on a contextualised understanding of each school's strengths and challenges.

5. Conclusions and summary of policy implications

5.1. Conclusions

Robust thinking about the implementation of effective approaches has sometimes been overlooked in the evidence-based policy movement. This research seeks to address that gap, combining a comprehensive review of existing policy with an in-depth examination of the operational realities and daily pressures faced by those on the front line of education delivery.

Our findings demonstrate that as schools strive to address the needs of vulnerable pupils, they are frequently hindered by systemic obstacles that undermine their ability to implement effective practices to prevent violence.

From funding and accountability structures to curricular demands and deficits in training and professional development, the current environment impedes efforts to address children's vulnerabilities and build their resilience to violence.

The key to improving outcomes lies in addressing these constraints.

The output of this work is not a new evidence-based practice or further evidence on what works. Instead, it provides a set of actionable steps that should be taken to leverage the existing evidence base in a more effective way.

We call for specific, meaningful policy and system changes that would enable schools to better integrate evidence-based practice within their settings and enhance their capacity to prevent violence.

The next step is to ensure these suggestions for policy and system changes are promoted among policymakers and to foster an understanding of the powerful impact the changes could have both on children's outcomes and on the broader social fabric.

With the right policy adjustments, we can empower education settings to overcome the obstacles they currently face and deliver more effective, equitable practices for children.

The scale of children's involvement in violence demands urgent action to ensure the widespread adoption of evidence-based approaches to prevention. The suggestions presented here offer a clear and actionable route to achieving this goal.

5.2. Summary of policy implications

Our policy implications are set out in full in Chapter 5 of this report, alongside their rationales and considerations for implementation. A summary of the key elements of each suggestion for policy and system change is provided below.

5.2.1. Policy Implication 1: establish a new Pastoral Premium grant for pupils with the greatest vulnerability to the risk of involvement in violence to help schools keep them safe

Our review found not only that funding is a key barrier to effective violence prevention but also that schools are often unsure of how to ensure their stretched budgets are invested in effective approaches to violence prevention. We suggest that a new Pastoral Premium grant is established to fund schools' work to keep children safe from violence and harm. The amount of funding schools receive should be calculated on the basis of eligibility criteria (relating to deprivation, SEN and persistent absence, suspension or exclusion among their pupils) and a degree of flexibility to ensure pupils who face other significant vulnerabilities are not missed out. All AP schools should receive funding for all pupils on roll. The Pastoral Premium should be spent by schools on commissioning or in-house delivery of activities taken from a menu of evidence-based approaches that are known to be effective in keeping children in education, providing trusted adults and supporting the development of social and emotional skills. Detailed guidance to support this should be provided by the DfE, which should retain responsibility (supported by the YEF) for ensuring both the menu and the accompanying guidance are kept up to date with new evidence. To support effective deployment of this funding, schools should be held accountable for how they use the Pastoral Premium through annual statements, scrutiny by Governors and trustees, and inspection by Ofsted and Estyn. (An alternative to introducing this new grant could be to expand the Pupil Premium and PDG instead, updating eligibility criteria and the range of activities on which funding can be spent to enable funds to be spent on keeping children safe from violence and harm.)

5.2.2. Policy Implication 2: use cross-government funding to implement hubs based in schools, with co-located workers from local support services and organisations working together to support children

While children face increasingly severe and complex needs, schools and external agencies are struggling to coordinate the provision of effective, timely support to meet those needs. We suggest that at least one school in each local area acts as a hub, bringing together local education settings, services and organisations to support vulnerable children through information- and best practice-sharing and coordination of support. Cross-government funding should be provided for each service and organisation participating in the hub and for a hub coordinator to facilitate and support partnership working. Hub members should be co-located in the school for at least part of their time, enabling them to upskill each other and work together to improve support for children in liaison and collaboration with parents and carers. Managerial responsibilities should remain with the home service/organisation of each hub professional, and while Ofsted and Estyn should hold schools to account for work engaging in the hub, they should not be responsible for holding other hub members to

account. Detailed guidance should be developed by national governments to leverage lessons from existing evidence on partnership working and to support the initial set-up and ongoing implementation of the hubs. (This suggestion could be achieved through a number of routes, from introducing a new funded policy to extending and expanding the APST programme – if its evaluation suggests promise – or utilising Young Futures programme funding.)

5.2.3. Policy Implication 3: ensure the ongoing review of the national curriculum in England results in an updated curriculum that better supports schools in preventing violence

High-quality education on relationships is known to be a protective factor against relationship-based violence among young people, but the quality of education on relationships and sex in England is highly inconsistent and often falls short. We suggest that the national curriculum gives greater priority to RSE and – as in Wales – that this should be compulsory. The DfE should provide detailed guidance to support schools in engaging actively with families to promote the understanding of what is taught and why effective teaching on these subjects is so important for protecting children from harm.

While the development of children's social and emotional skills is also crucial to building resilience to violence, the national curriculum in England does not adequately prioritise and support this learning. We suggest that the curriculum should be rebalanced to give greater priority to the development of social and emotional skills, drawing on lessons from the recent implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales.

Requirements made for academies and AP schools should also reflect these changes to ensure all children can benefit.

5.2.4. Policy Implication 4: update initial training and continuing professional development for all school staff to equip them to keep children safe from violence and meet the requirements of the new national curriculum

Given the complexity and severity of children's needs, the delivery of effective practice to prevent violence demands an education workforce with a broad set of highly developed skills. There is, however, inadequate focus on a range of crucial areas in ITT and CPD for school staff. We suggest that all members of the school community, including teachers, pastoral staff, Senior Leaders and Governors, should be trained in evidence-based approaches to developing social and emotional skills, understanding and managing behaviour effectively (including understanding pupils and their contexts and tailoring support to pupils' needs), incorporating anti-racist practice and preventing bullying. Training should also focus on supporting children with SEN, improving awareness of the role of AP, with AP and SEN educators involved in training delivery, and expanding opportunities for placements in AP and special schools.

Trainers and mentors should themselves receive training on these issues from established experts.

5.2.5. Policy Implication 5: ensure upcoming changes by Ofsted include a focus on inclusive, equitable good practice to reduce violence

Ofsted's recently announced plans offer a meaningful opportunity to transform a key element of the accountability system and remove the current perverse incentives that militate against inclusive practice in schools. We suggest that upcoming changes should incentivise and reward schools that are carrying out good practices to reduce violence. The planned annual reviews of inclusion issues should include consideration of schools' uses of official and unofficial exclusions and suspensions, with a focus on identifying and sharing good practice that helps to keep children in education. The revised inspection framework and new School Report Cards should consider pupils' levels of need, vulnerability and disadvantage in each school and account for schools' differing contexts in the assessment of the quality of support for vulnerable children. This should include recognising the challenges faced by schools that serve cohorts with particularly high needs, vulnerabilities and disadvantages and appropriately rewarding inclusive practices that help meet these needs. Particular attention should be paid during Ofsted inspections to whether there is any disproportionality in school practices and resulting pupil experiences and outcomes, and the inspectorate should continue to strengthen engagement with staff, parents, carers and pupils to hear their views on these issues.

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7. Annex 1: Delphi consultation: further information and results

7.1. Context

We asked workshop attendees to complete surveys at two timepoints:

- **Pre-workshop.** Before the workshops, we asked all 20 attendees to read an Evidence Pack, which included early drafts of the five Policy Implications , and to respond to a survey. The purpose of this survey was to gather attendees' views of the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of the suggested changes. The survey findings were then presented in the workshops and used as a basis for discussion.

- **In-workshop.** Following discussion and refinement of Policy Implications during Workshops 1 and 2, we asked all attendees to take part in a survey during the workshop.[24] [25] We asked attendees to consider Policy Implications that had been updated based on workshop discussions. The purpose of this survey was to see whether the workshop discussion and edited Policy Implications affected attendees' views of feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness.

This annex includes information on the changes made to Policy Implications during the consultation, and findings from the pre-workshop and in-workshop surveys.

7.2. Survey questions

We also asked all attendees in the pre-workshop and in-workshop surveys to answer questions on how **feasible, desirable,** and **potentially effective** they thought each Policy Implication was.

To explore **feasibility,** respondents were asked: **"**How easy would it be for schools to implement this change, if introduced by government?". Options for responses included:

- Very easy: no major or minor challenges in implementation foreseen
- Somewhat easy: some minor challenges in implementation foreseen
- Not easy: major challenges in implementation foreseen

[24] In Workshop 1, on Friday 27 September, we discussed Policy Recommendations 1, 3, and 4. In Workshop 2, on Monday 30 September, we discussed Policy Recommendations 1, 2 and 5. We discussed Policy Recommendation 1 twice because of the extent to which funding was discussed as a challenge during interviews and because it was considered the least feasible of the policy options.

[25] There were 11 attendees at Workshop 1, and 8 at Workshop 2.

- Don’t know

To explore **desirability,** respondents were asked: “How desirable would this change be for school leaders, if introduced by government?”. Options for responses included:

- Very desirable: I think that most school leaders would support this
- Somewhat desirable: I think that some school leaders would support this, but some would not
- Not desirable: I think that most school leaders would not support this
- Don’t know

To explore **potential effectiveness,** respondents were asked: “If introduced by a government, how effective would this change be in helping schools deliver good practice that keeps children safe?” Respondents were asked to think particularly about effectiveness in keeping children in education, providing children with trusted adults, and supporting children’s social and emotional development. Options for responses included:

- Very effective: it would help a lot
- Somewhat effective: it would help a bit
- Not effective: it would not help at all
- Don’t know

We also asked all attendees in the pre-workshop and in-workshop surveys to **rank the Policy Implications in order of priority**. Respondents were asked “Reflecting on your responses above, please indicate the top 3 you think should be prioritised for implementation.” Options for responses included:

- Policy Implication 1
- Policy Implication 2
- Policy Implication 3
- Policy Implication 4
- Policy Implication 5

In addition, we asked all attendees in the pre-workshop survey to provide any additional open-text thoughts on feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness. These were analysed by the research team and used to inform discussion points for the workshops.

7.3. Policy Implication 1: Establish a 'pastoral premium' grant

7.3.1. Changes made to Policy Implication 1 through consultation with stakeholders

Adding an element of school discretion in determining eligibility

Delphi participants indicated concerns that some children may 'fall through the cracks', and particularly those with increased vulnerability to violence as a result of other characteristics or life events that were not included in the original eligibility criteria (for example, if they have an older sibling involved in violent offending). To address these concerns, some Delphi participants suggested that funding could be allocated at a school-level rather than a pupil-level, based on existing data about the school cohort. However, others felt that this would be less effective because existing data might not provide a full picture of children who were particularly vulnerable.

We discussed two potential changes to address these concerns with participants during Workshops 1 and 2:

- Change eligibility criteria so that funding is being decided at a whole school level, instead of per pupil. This was felt by most Delphi participants, as reported in discussion and in the in-workshop survey, to make the Policy Implication less feasible and desirable. As a result, this was not adopted into the updated Policy Implication.

- To allow schools to add children to the Pastoral Premium register who fell outside of the eligibility groups if there was a good reason why they would be more vulnerable to involvement in violence. This was felt by most Delphi participants, as reported in discussion and in the in-workshop survey, to make the Policy Implication more feasible and effective. As a result, this was adopted into the updated Policy Implication.

Adding further detail on the menu of interventions

Delphi participants proposed that at least some of the funding from the Pastoral Premium grant should be used to run whole-school interventions. This was because participants felt that this would ensure schools developed more inclusive environments and cultures which, they felt, were key to keeping children in school. Delphi participants also felt that funding could be used to provide individual interventions for children most at risk at the school's discretion. As a result, we updated the to reflect that schools should be encouraged to use funding on both whole-school and individual interventions.

Delphi participants also flagged other approaches, which do not appear in the YEF's evidence-based guidance, as good to include on the 'menu of interventions'. This included whole-family approaches and restorative approaches. Delphi participants recognised that these did not yet have rigorous evidence around their impact on reducing children's involvement in violence,

but evaluations are ongoing. As a result, we updated the Policy Implication to reflect that the menu of interventions should be kept updated in line with emerging evidence.

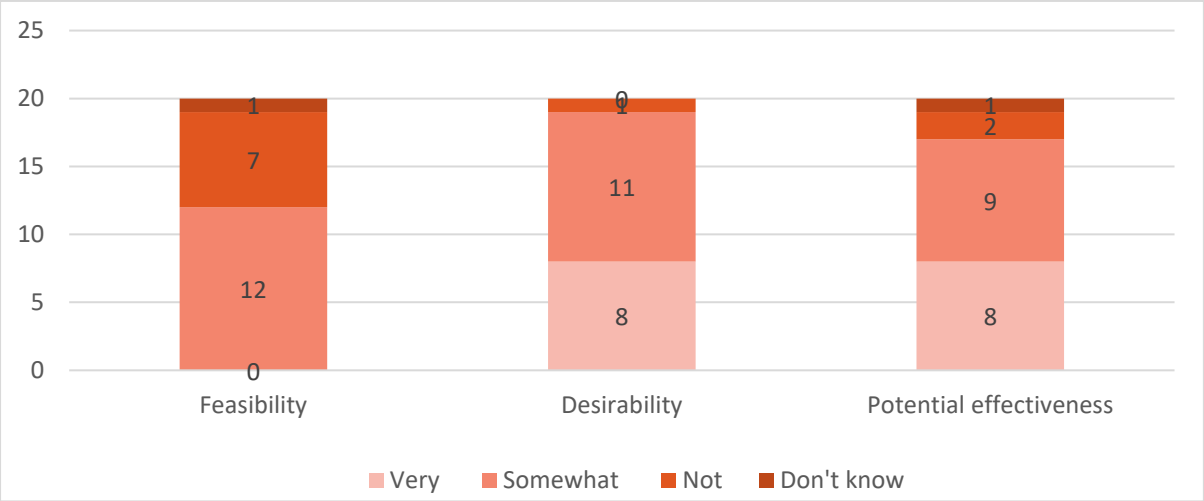
Adding government guidance on assessing pupil needs and commissioning evidence-based activities

Delphi participants identified that carrying out activities of this sort would be new to many schools and settings, which may not have experience in commissioning support externally, delivering support themselves, or assessing children's needs in this way. As a result, we updated the Policy Implication to reflect that guidance should be provided to schools on these points.

7.3.2. Pre-workshop survey results

The Figure below shows attendees' responses to the pre-workshop survey. This suggests that most felt it would not be easy, with almost all identifying major or minor challenges to feasibility. However, most felt it was desirable: for at least some school leaders, if not all. Most reported it could be potentially effective and help at least a little, or a lot.

Figure 11: Pre-workshop survey results: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 1



Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=20. See above for questions asked.

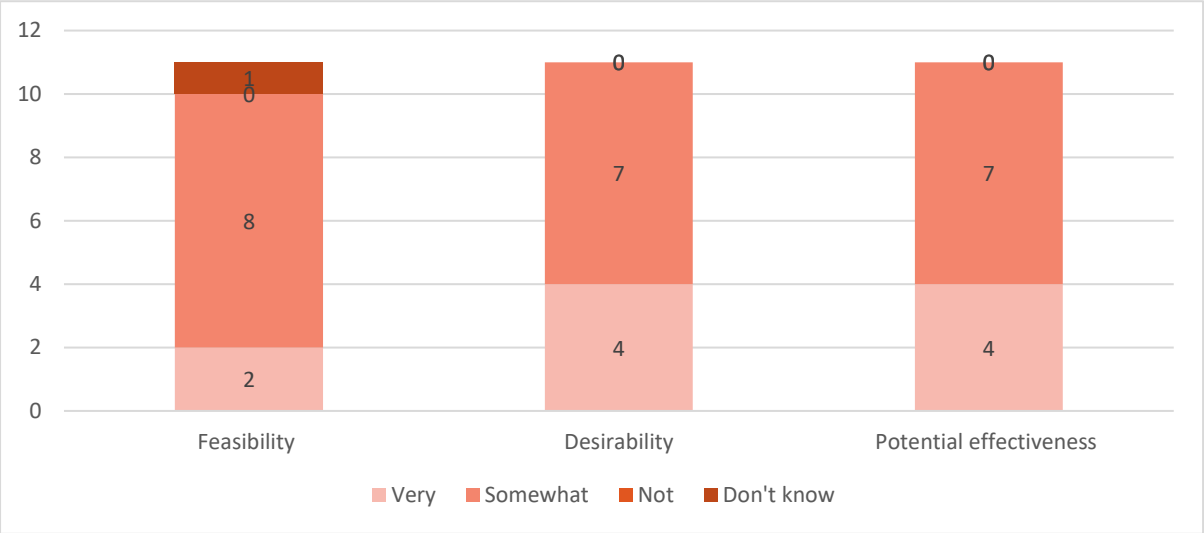
We discussed Policy Implication 1 in Workshops 1 and 2, and carried out two further in-workshop surveys.

7.3.3. Workshop 1 survey results

In Workshop 1, we edited the Policy Implication in line with discussion during the workshop. The edits were to (a) allow schools to have discretion to add pupils to the Pastoral Premium register if they do not meet core eligibility criteria but there are clear reasons why they are

otherwise vulnerable to involvement in violence, (b) expect schools to spend grant mainly on whole-school activities, and (c) provide schools with guidance from YEF on how to commission or run activities. The Figure below suggests that, following discussion and revisions to the Policy Implication, respondents were more likely to think to agree with each other and more likely to think that the Policy Implication was feasible and could be potentially effective than in the pre-workshop survey.

Figure 12: In-workshop survey results from Workshop 1: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 1

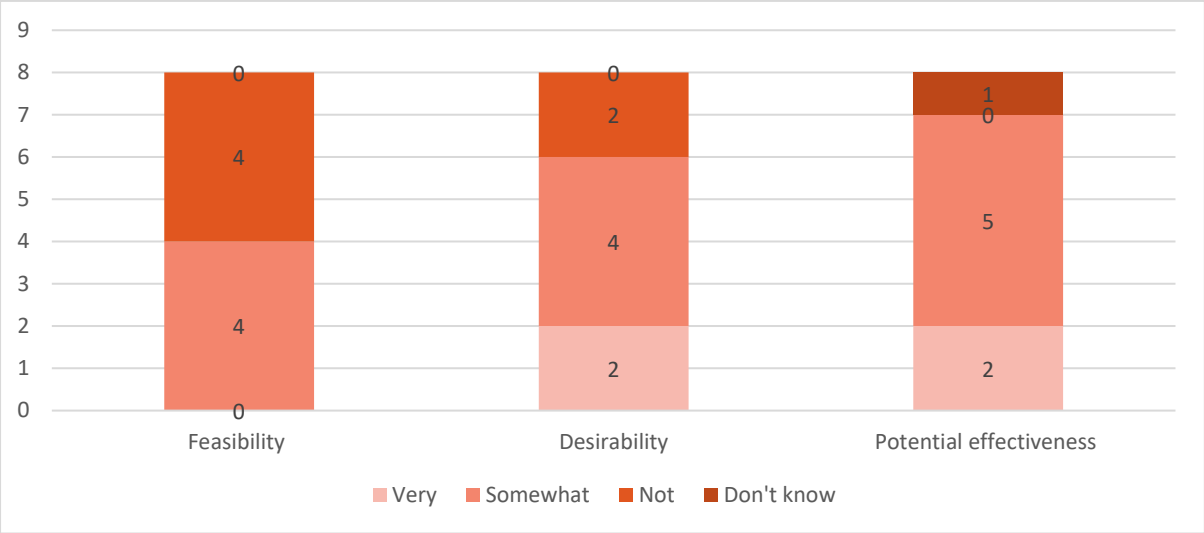


Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=11. See above for questions asked.

7.3.4. Workshop 2 survey results

In Workshop 2, we edited the Policy Implication in line with discussion during the workshop – in ways that were different to Workshop 1. The edits were to (a) instead of providing funding to schools based on individual pupils' eligibility, provide funding to schools based on whole-school pupil make-up, informed by metrics around need and qualitative assessment of pupils' needs, (b) encourage schools to decide between providing whole-school and individual interventions, and (c) ensure the 'menu of interventions' is based on YEF evidence and kept updated as more evidence emerges. The Figure below suggests that, following discussion and revisions to the Policy Implication in Workshop 2, respondents were not more aligned and were less likely to think that the Policy Implication was feasible and desirable than in the Workshop 1 and pre-workshop surveys.

Figure 13: In-workshop survey results from Workshop 2: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 1



Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=8. See above for questions asked.

7.4. Policy Implication 2: With cross-government funding, schools become a hub with workers from local support services and organisations co-located in the school

7.4.1. Changes made to Policy Implication 2 through consultation with stakeholders

Adding a scoping exercise

Delphi participants reflected in the pre-workshop survey that this Policy Implication would be difficult to implement – half anticipated major challenges to implementation. Participants had questions and reflections about the practicalities: including which organisations would be included in hub, which schools would be chosen to host the hubs, how many hubs would be included in a local area, and which organisation would hold overall responsibility for its operations. Discussion at the workshop suggested that carrying out a scoping exercise in each local area would help to address these questions. After this was added to the draft Policy Implication, Delphi participants were more positive on feasibility in the in-workshop survey – with most anticipating minor challenges to implementation instead. As a result, we updated the Policy Implication to reflect that a scoping exercise should take place in each area.

Adding clarification on responsibilities

Delphi participants reflected in the pre-workshop survey that this Policy Implication may be less desirable amongst school leaders if host schools were required to take on accountability or responsibility for the delivery of services by other organisations. Suggestions were made

to edit the Policy Implication to suggest MATs or LAs would be responsible for the overall administration of the hubs, to clarify that schools would not be responsible for the activities or performance of non-educational services, and to state that Ofsted should be responsible for holding schools to account for work engaging in the hub but not for holding other organisations involved in the hub to account. With these edits, Delphi participants were more positive on desirability – with all those attending the workshop indicating that this would be desirable for most school leaders. As a result, we updated the Policy Implication accordingly.

Adding government guidance on hub implementation

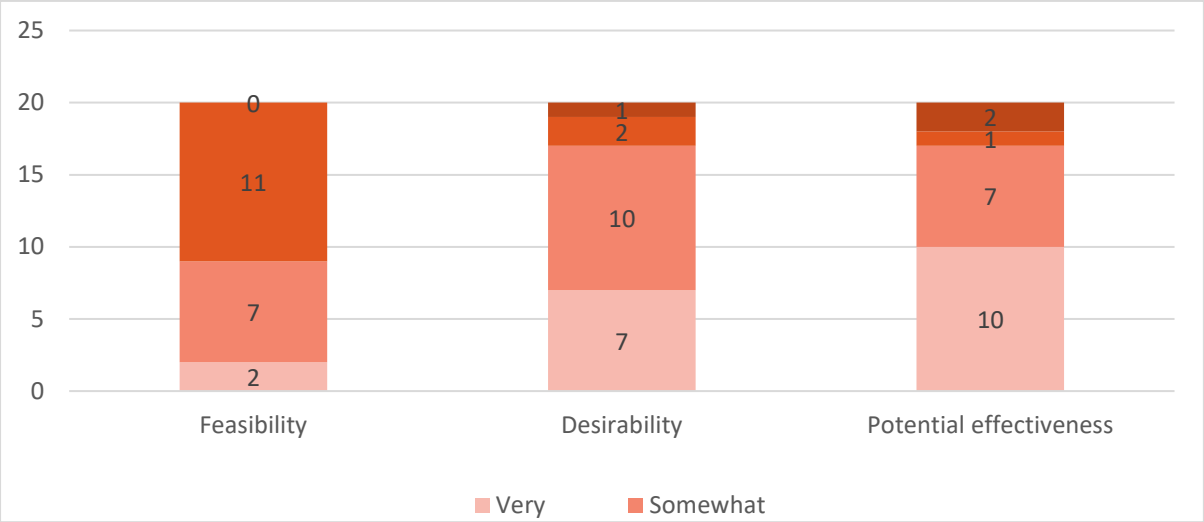
Delphi participants were positive about the potential effectiveness of the hubs. They thought it would help issues be identified and rectified more rapidly, that it would improve coordination and collaboration between local agency schools, and upskill school staff. Delphi participants also gave many examples of where hubs and partnerships had been used to support better practice and improve multi agency working between schools and other bodies.[26] Given this, we suggest that efforts are made to harness this learning and include it in guidance for schools. As a result, we updated the Policy Implication accordingly.

7.4.2. Pre-workshop survey results

The Figure below shows attendees' responses to the pre-workshop survey. Most Delphi participants did not think implementing this Policy Implication would be easy for school leaders, with just over half identifying major challenges to feasibility and most of the remaining identifying minor challenges. However, most felt it was desirable: for at least some school leaders, if not all. Half of participants felt it was potentially very effective, with most of the remaining reflecting that it would help at least a little.

[26] Examples include the Social Workers in Schools programme, teaching school hubs, SAFE, and APST.

Figure 14: Pre-workshop survey results: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 2

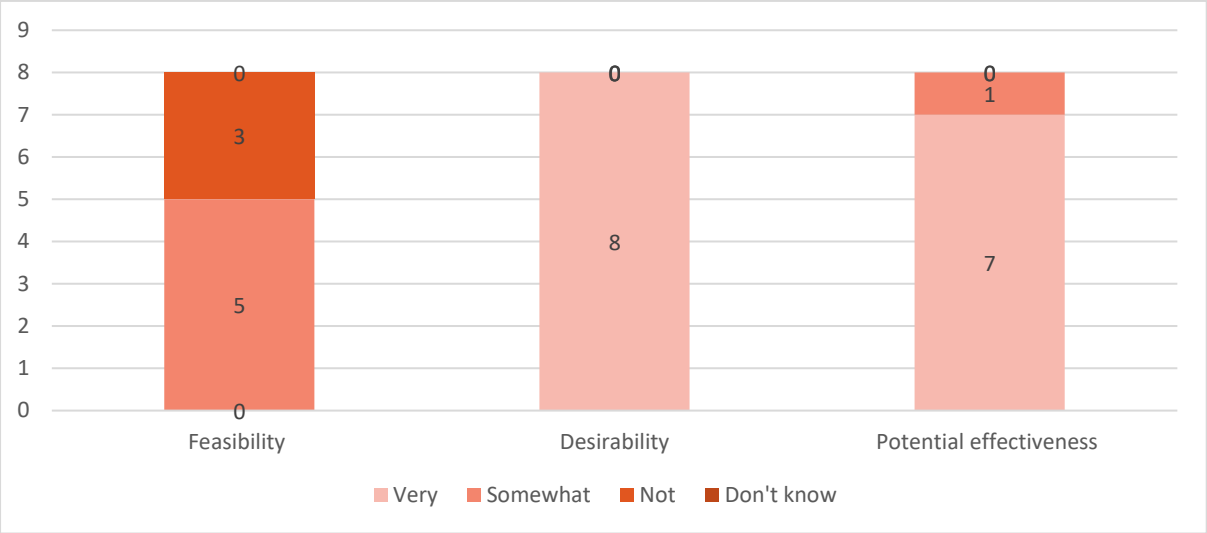


Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=20. See above for questions asked.

7.4.3. Workshop 2 survey results

In Workshop 2, we edited the Policy Implication in line with discussion during the workshop. The edits were to (a) suggest that the hub would be run by the MAT or LA – rather than by an individual school – but still hosted in a school, (b) start with a listening exercise to determine what the hub would involve in that area (c) clarify that Ofsted should celebrate schools' involvement in the hub but should not hold other agencies' work to account. The Figure below suggests that, following discussion and revisions to the Policy Implication, respondents were more likely to be aligned in their thinking around feasibility and consider that the Policy Implication would be somewhat feasible with minor challenges. Figure 12also suggests that Delphi participants were more aligned and more positive about the desirability of the Policy Implication for school leaders and the potential effectiveness of the Policy Implication in helping more schools carry out good practice to prevent children's involvement in violence.

Figure 15: In-workshop survey results from Workshop 2: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 2



Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=8. See above for questions asked.

7.5. Policy Implication 3: The ongoing review of the National Curriculum in England results in an updated curriculum that better supports schools in preventing violence

7.5.1. Changes made to Policy Implication 3 through consultation with stakeholders

Changing the scope of curriculum change

The initial draft suggested that the curriculum could give greater priority to technical and vocational subjects, and centre anti-racist teaching throughout the curriculum. Since then, however, the government has announced a review of the existing national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England, which will seek to deliver 'a broader curriculum, with improved access to music, art, sport and drama, as well as vocational subjects' and 'a curriculum that reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented'. Were these changes not already included within the stated aims of the curriculum and assessment review, it is likely they would have formed part of our suggestion for change. As it is, we simply express support for these existing aims of the review, on the basis that evidence from our review suggests they may help schools to keep children engaged with their education, by addressing some of the challenges to good practice we have identified.

Discussions throughout the Delphi consultation helped refine the particular skills that the curriculum should teach.

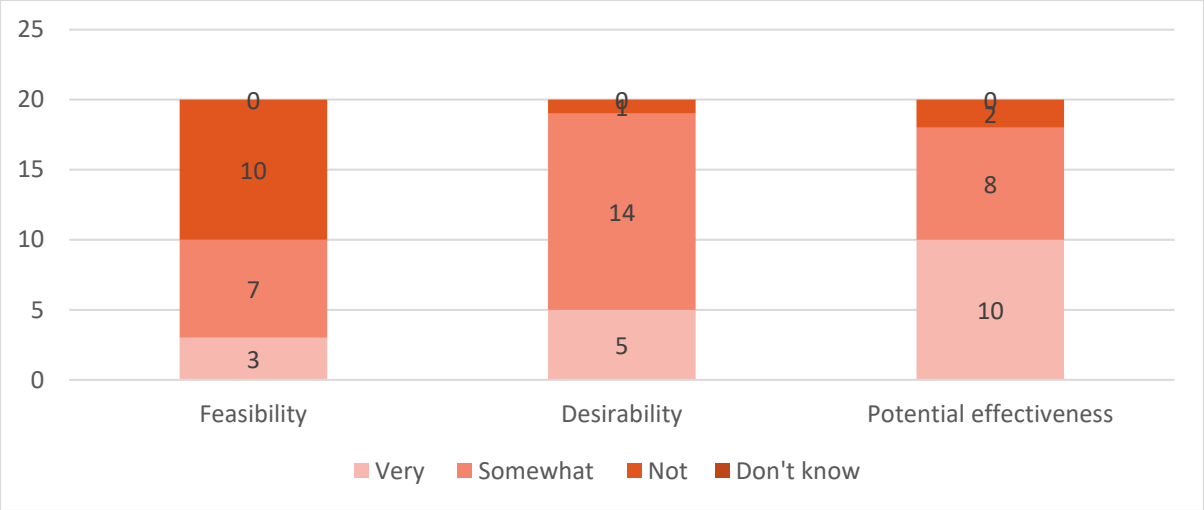
Adding government guidance to schools on communication with parents and carers around relationships and sex education

While Delphi participants were in favour of requiring RSE, with no right to withdraw, they emphasised that schools need support and guidance on engaging with parents and carers to inform them about this teaching and address concerns.

7.5.2. Pre-workshop survey results

The Figure below shows attendees' responses to the pre-workshop survey. Most Delphi participants did not think implementing this change would be easy for school leaders, with just over half identifying major challenges to feasibility and most of the remaining identifying minor challenges. However, most felt it was desirable: for at least some school leaders, if not all. Half of participants felt it was potentially very effective, with most of the remaining reflecting that it would help at least a little.

Figure 16: Pre-workshop survey results: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 3



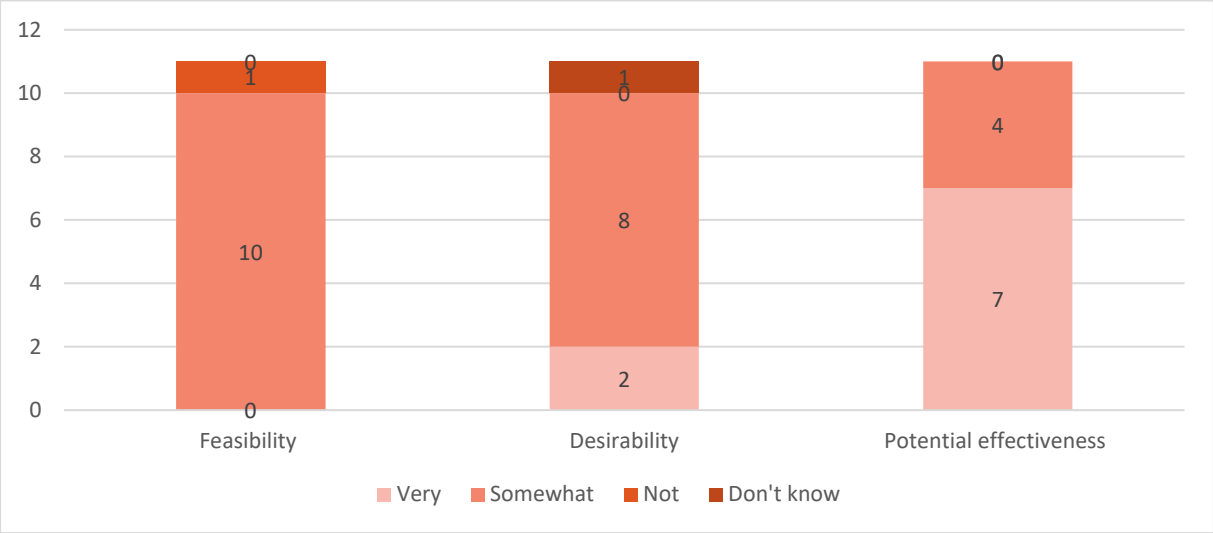
Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=20. See above for questions asked.

7.5.3. Workshop 1 survey results

In Workshop 1, we edited the Policy Implication in line with discussion during the workshop. The edits were to (a) ensure that the curriculum includes skills around self-regulation and conflict resolution, (b) ensure that the curriculum for every lesson integrates skills on listening, critical thinking, engaging in debate and working in teams (c) provide schools with guidance about how to communicate with families around RSE. The Figure below suggests that, following discussion and revisions to the Policy Implication, respondents were more aligned and more likely to think it would be feasible and more aligned in their thinking, with all agreeing it would be somewhat easy for school leaders to implement. The Figure below

also reflects small improvements in desirability and effectiveness, with no one reflecting that it would not be desirable or potentially effective.

Figure 17: In-workshop survey results from Workshop 1: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 3



Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=11. See above for questions asked.

7.6. Policy Implication 4: Initial teacher training and continuing professional development requirements are updated to equip staff to keep children safe from violence and meet the requirements of the new National Curriculum

7.6.1. Changes made to Policy Implication 4 through consultation with stakeholders

Expanding who should receive the training

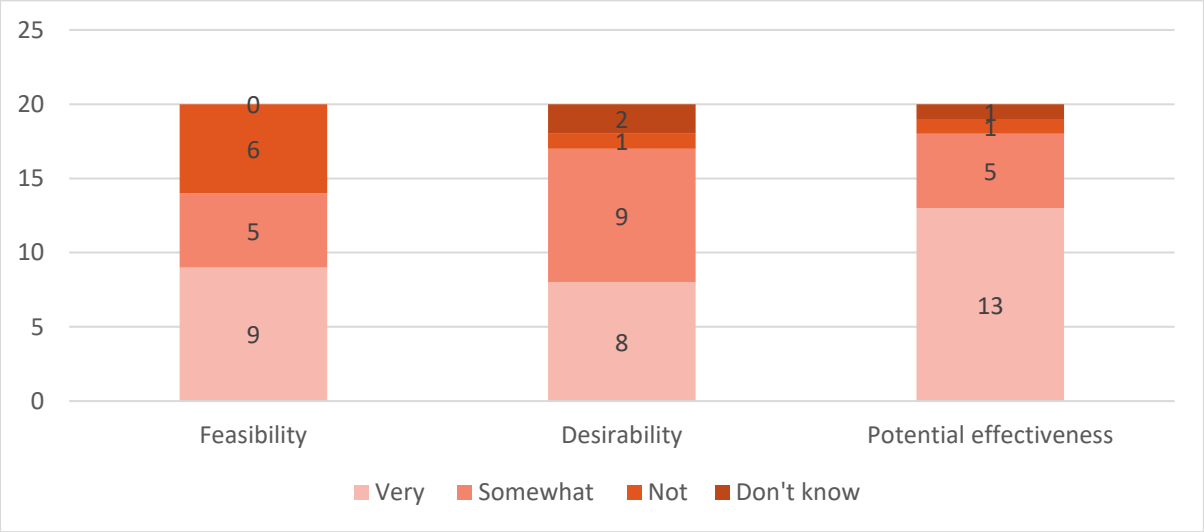
Delphi participants highlighted the need for senior leaders and school governors to be included in the training. Initially, the suggested change had been targeted at training and CPD for teachers, but Delphi participants noted that, without the support of senior leaders, other school staff would find it difficult to implement practice approaches learned in training. Equally, senior leaders need the backing of school governors to implement relational approaches. Training in the approaches above for all members of the school community would ensure they have a minimum level of understanding, helping them pull in the same direction.

7.6.2. Pre-workshop survey results

The Figure below shows attendees' responses to the pre-workshop survey. Delphi participants were divided in their views on feasibility: while almost half thought it would be

easy for school leaders, similar numbers thought there would be minor or major challenges to implementation. Most Delphi participants felt it would be desirable for at least some leaders. Most Delphi participants also thought that this change could be potentially very effective, with few reflecting that it would not help at all.

Figure 18: Pre-workshop survey results: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 4

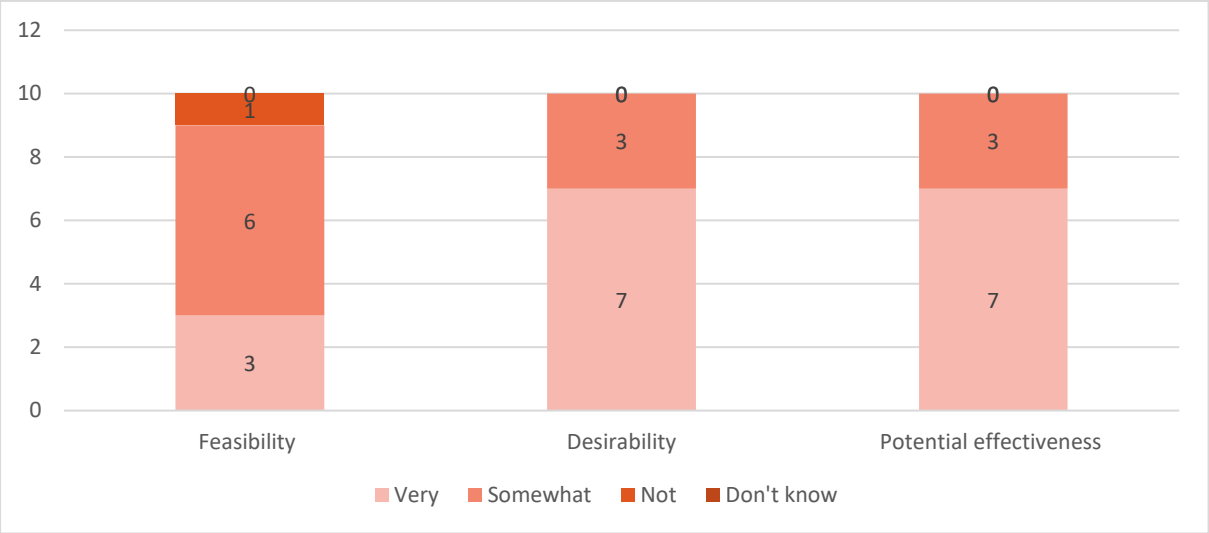


Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=20. See above for questions asked.

7.6.3. Workshop 1 survey results

In Workshop 1, we edited the Policy Implication in line with discussion during the workshop. The edits were to (a) include training on conflict resolution and how to build and maintain a healthy school environment, (b) ensure that training included continuous professional development for all school staff, SLT, and governors, (c) expand opportunities for placements in and visits to AP and special schools, and (d) ensure trainers and mentors themselves receive training on these issues from established experts. The Figure below suggests that, following discussion and revisions to the Policy Implication, respondents were more likely to think that the change would be feasible to implement than in the pre-workshop survey. The Figure below also suggests that Delphi participants were slightly more positive and more aligned about the desirability of the change for school leaders. There were few changes in perceptions of the potential effectiveness of the change in helping more schools carry out good practice to prevent children's involvement in violence.

Figure 19: In-workshop survey results from Workshop 1: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 4



Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=11. See above for questions asked.

7.7. Policy Implication 5: Upcoming changes by Ofsted include a focus on good practice to reduce violence

7.7.1. Changes made to Policy Implication 5 through consultation with stakeholders

Removing a suggestion to move towards a more formative approach to inspection, with a focus on supporting school improvement

Interviewees had criticism Ofsted for a range of things, including an overly summative, high-stakes approach to inspection, that created undue pressure of school staff and was felt to be ineffective in supporting school improvement.

The initial draft suggestion included in the evidence thus suggested that, through the Ofsted Academy and new Inspection Framework centre, Ofsted could centre a more formative approach to inspection. We suggested this could include building long-term relationships and collaborative partnership working between the inspectorate and schools, and providing schools with relevant guidance and resources for improvement based on contextualised understanding of each school's strengths and challenges.

We recognised that this change would represent a fundamental shift in the purpose of Ofsted, away from being from a 'pure' inspectorate, towards becoming (in addition) a mechanism for enabling school improvement.

Some of our Delphi participants urged that, given the scale of reform needed to address concerns and build trust in the school inspectorate among the school sector, this element of the suggested change should be dropped, at least until trust had been re-built.

There was, however, support for a longer-term shift towards a regulatory system that, as a whole, was better aligned to the goal of supporting school improvement.

Increasing specificity of how to inspect inclusion

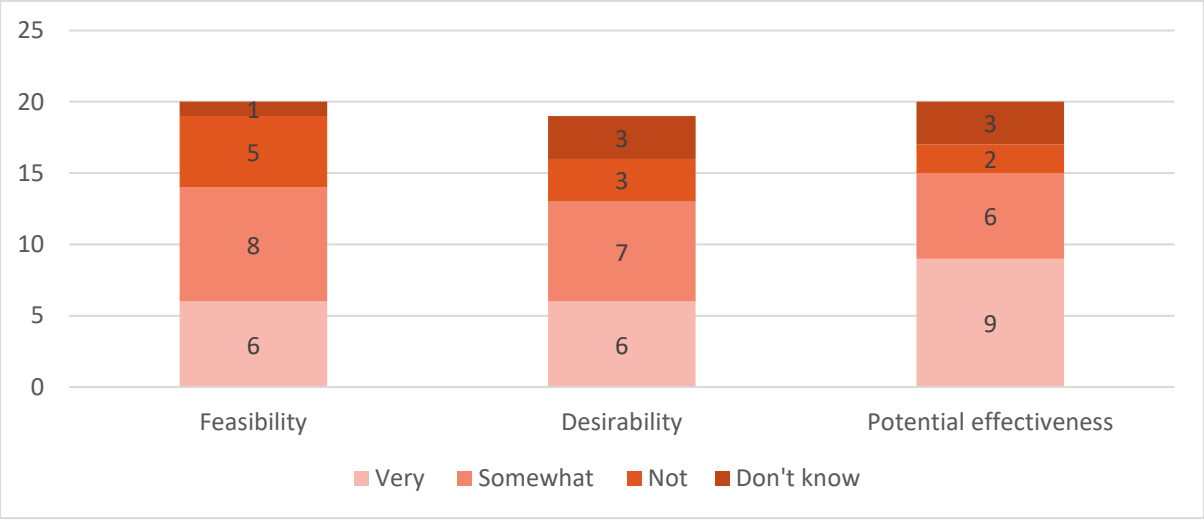
One concern mentioned by our Delphi participants was that Ofsted's addition of inclusion to the areas it inspects should not simply function to increase burden and worry for schools. It should instead provide motivation and reward for genuinely inclusive practice, while disincentivising practices such as off-rolling or excluding pupils who could remain within the school community with the right support.

We carefully considered the wording of the Policy Implication, to ensure its framing reflects this intention.

7.7.2. Pre-workshop survey results

The Figure below shows attendees' responses to the pre-workshop survey. Delphi participants were divided in their views on feasibility: relatively even numbers thought it would be easy, have minor challenges to implementation, or have major challenges to implementation. This was also the case for desirability, although most felt it would be desirable for at least some school leaders, a few felt it would not be desirable at all or did not know. While most Delphi participants thought that this change could be potentially very or somewhat effective, a few did not agree, and a few did not know.

Figure 20: Pre-workshop survey results: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 5

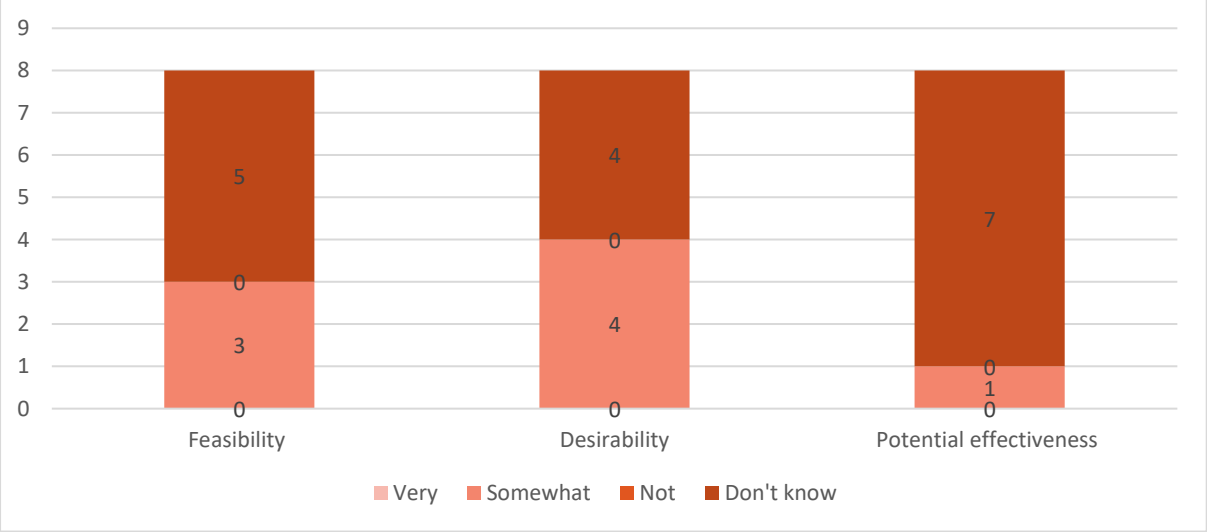


Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=20. See above for questions asked.

7.7.3. Workshop 2 survey results

In Workshop 2, we edited the Policy Implication in line with discussion during the workshop. The edits were to (a) remove the suggestion that Ofsted shifts from being purely an inspectorate towards having responsibility for supporting school improvements, (b) suggest that Ofsted assesses inclusive practice – including use of pastoral premium – and uses metrics of inclusion (c) suggest that once other policy changes have been implemented, Ofsted holds schools to account for these where appropriate. The Figure below suggests that, following discussion and revisions to the Policy Implication, respondents at the workshop were more likely to report that they did not know whether or not the change would be feasible for schools, desirable, or potential effective. This reflects the workshop discussion, which demonstrated that only a minority of participants felt they had strong understanding of Ofsted's current remit and practice and the planned reforms.

Figure 21: In-workshop survey results from Workshop 2: workshop attendees' reflections on the feasibility, desirability, and potential effectiveness of Policy Implication 5



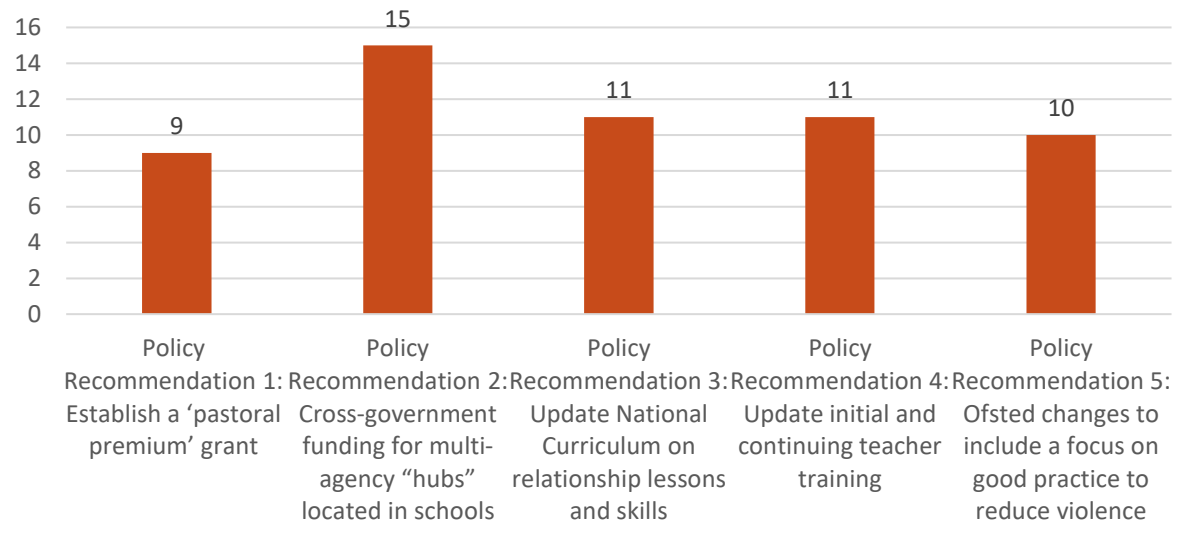
Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=8. See above for questions asked.

7.8. Survey responses on cross-cutting prioritisation

7.8.1. Pre-workshop survey results

The Figure below shows attendees' responses to the pre-workshop survey. When indicating their top 3 changes to take forwards, most Delphi participants reported that Policy Implication 2 was the most important to take forwards. Within the other Policy Implications , roughly equal numbers felt that the Policy Implication was the most important.

Figure 22: Pre-workshop survey results: reflections on prioritisation



Source: Pre-workshop survey. N=20. See above for questions asked.

7.8.2. Workshop 1 and 2 survey results

In Workshops 1 and 2 we asked respondents to indicate the most important Policy Implication of those discussed. We used a different formulation of the question, due to the facilities of the in-workshop survey tool: asking respondents to rank Policy Implications that were discussed from being of lowest priority (1) to highest priority (5). Policy Implication 2 was most consistently rated the highest importance, with all those attending Workshop 2 considering that this is most important. This was followed by Policy Implications 3 and 4. Policy Implication 1 and 5 were considered least importance: with a significant fall in importance for Policy Implication 5.

Figure 23: In-workshop survey results from Workshops 1 and 2: reflections on prioritisation

Choices	Weighted average**	1 (lowest)	2	3	4	5 (highest)	Respondents
Policy Implication 1: 'Pastoral premium' grant	**3.5**	3	1	3	7	5	19*
Policy Implication 2: Multi-agency hubs located in schools	**5.0**	0	0	0	0	8	8
Policy Implication 3: Updated National Curriculum	**4.3**	0	1	0	5	5	11

Policy Implication 4: Updated school staff training and CPD	**4.6**	0	0	0	4	7	11
Policy Implication 5: Ofsted change of focus	**1.9**	3	3	2	0	0	8

*Source: In-workshop surveys. Respondents were asked "Reflecting on your responses from the previous slides, please rank the Policy Implications from 'Not a priority' to 'Highest priority'". For Policy Implications 3 and 4, n=11. For Policy Implication 5, n=8. *Policy Implication 1 was discussed in both workshops and the table provides the total number of respondents in both workshops, n=19. ** The weighted average is calculated by (number of people who responded on a value * the value) / (total number of respondents).*

8. Annex 2: Coding framework

The final coding framework used in this study, including deductive and inductive codes, is set out below.

Figure 24: Coding framework

Parent code	**RQ1: Policy**
Level 1 child code	Keeping children in education
Level 1 child code	Providing trusted adults
Level 1 child code	Developing social and emotional skills
Level 1 child code	Cross-cutting/other
Parent code	**RQ2&3: Practice**
Level 1 child code	Supporting attendance
Level 2 child code	Equity lens (SEND, neurodivergence, minoritised ethnicity, gender, deprivation, etc.)
Level 2 child code	Good/promising practice
Level 1 child code	Reducing need for exclusions/suspensions
Level 2 child code	Equity lens (SEND, neurodivergence, minoritised ethnicity, gender, deprivation, etc.)
Level 2 child code	Good/promising practice
Level 1 child code	Providing trusted adults
Level 2 child code	Equity lens (SEND, neurodivergence, minoritised ethnicity, gender, deprivation, etc.)
Level 2 child code	Good/promising practice
Level 1 child code	Developing social and emotional skills
Level 2 child code	Equity lens (SEND, neurodivergence, minoritised ethnicity, gender, deprivation, etc.)
Level 2 child code	Good/promising practice
Level 1 child code	PSHE/healthy relationships education
Level 2 child code	Equity lens (SEND, neurodivergence, minoritised ethnicity, gender, deprivation, etc.)
Level 2 child code	Good/particularly promising practice
Level 1 child code	AP/PRU support to children

Level 2 child code	Equity lens (SEND, neurodivergence, minoritised ethnicity, gender, deprivation, etc.)
Level 2 child code	Good/promising practice
Level 1 child code	Mainstream school support to excluded/suspended children
Level 2 child code	Equity lens (SEND, neurodivergence, minoritised ethnicity, gender, deprivation, etc.)
Level 2 child code	Good/promising practice
Level 1 child code	External (non-school/AP) support to excluded/suspended children
Level 2 child code	LA
Level 2 child code	Third sector
Level 2 child code	Other services
Level 1 child code	Local/partnership working
Level 1 child code	Off-rolling
Level 1 child code	Unofficial/informal/internal exclusions/suspensions
Level 1 child code	Managed moves
Level 1 child code	Cross-cutting/other
Parent code	**RQ4: Challenges**
Level 1 child code	Children's needs/situations
Level 1 child code	Parents'/families' needs/situations
Level 1 child code	Funding
Level 2 child code	Mainstream
Level 2 child code	AP
Level 2 child code	SEND
Level 1 child code	School/AP culture
Level 1 child code	School types (LA-maintained/Academy)
Level 1 child code	Curriculum
Level 2 child code	PSHE

Level 1 child code	Ofsted/Estyn
Level 1 child code	Staff skills/training
Level 2 child code	PSHE
Level 1 child code	Staff recruitment and retention
Level 1 child code	School/AP leadership
Level 1 child code	School/AP governance boards
Level 1 child code	Parents of other children
Level 1 child code	School/AP buildings
Level 1 child code	AP-specific challenges
Level 1 child code	Limitations of external agencies/support services/partnership working
Level 1 child code	Data limitations
Level 1 child code	Evidence limitations
Level 1 child code	Cross-cutting/other
Parent code	**RQ5&6: Recommendations**
Level 1 child code	Funding
Level 1 child code	Curriculum
Level 1 child code	Ofsted/Estyn inspectorates
Level 1 child code	Staff training (teacher/SLT/support staff training)
Level 1 child code	Relationships between mainstream/AP/special schools
Level 1 child code	Local/multi-agency partnership working
Level 1 child code	Data/evidence
Level 1 child code	Ethos/values
Level 1 child code	SEND/additional needs
Level 1 child code	Cross-cutting/other