



Education Policy, Children and Violence

Eight recommendations for education
policymakers to prevent children's
involvement in violence in England and
Wales

May 2025



About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund 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.

The charity was established in 2019 with a 10-year £200 million endowment from the Home Office.

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The report is authored by Joe Collin.

Introduction

This guidance provides education policymakers across England and Wales with eight recommendations on how to prevent children's involvement in violence.

Defining violence and its prevalence

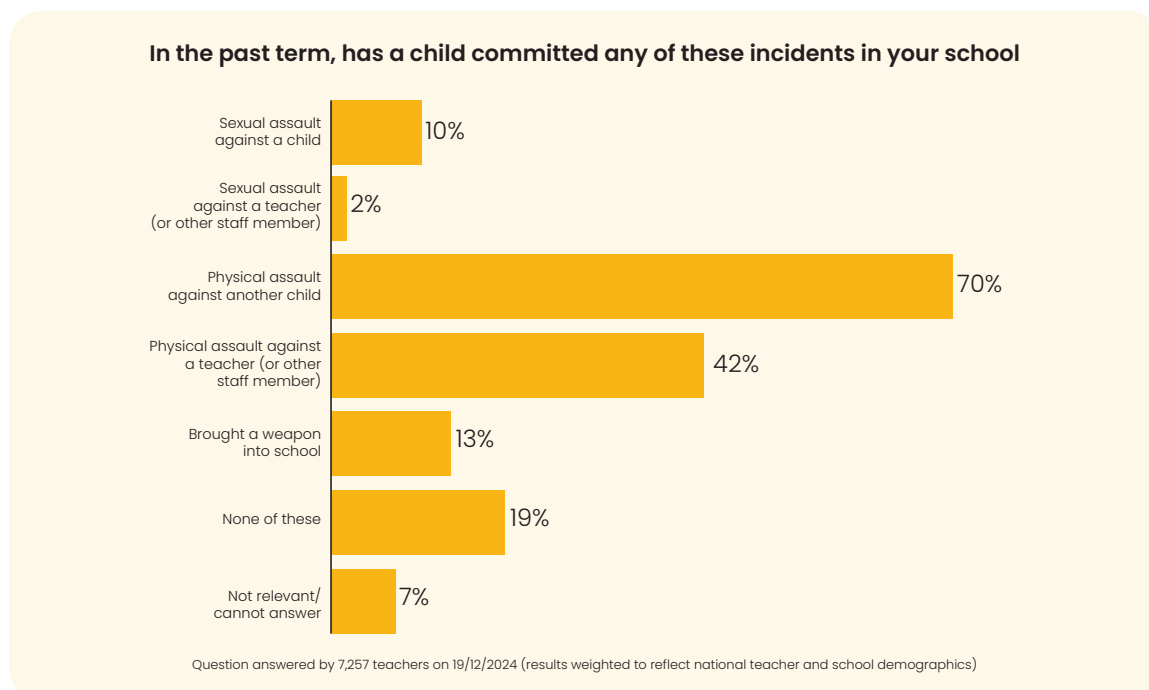
Violence is the use or threat of intentional physical force.¹ It can include murder, physical assault, sexual assault, harm (or the threat of harm) with a weapon and robbery.²

Violence among children is unacceptably common. In 2024, across England and Wales:

- A fifth (20%) of teenage children reported being victims of violence.
- Over half (61%) of these incidents led to physical injury, affecting 440,000 children in England and Wales.
- For some, experiencing violence is not a one-off event. In 2024, of teenage children who were victims of violence, 65% experienced it multiple times within the year, with nearly a third (31%) – or 5% of all teenage children – reporting that it occurred more than five times.³

We also know that violence happens in schools, colleges and alternative provision (AP) or education other than at school (EOTAS) settings. In December 2024, 70% of teachers across English primary and secondary schools reported incidents of physical assault between children during the previous term. Additionally, 42% reported physical assaults against teachers and staff, 13% reported instances where a child had brought a weapon into school and 10% reported cases of sexual assault against a child.⁴

Figure 1: Incidents in schools in the preceding term



The education system plays a key role in protecting children from violence

Of course, many other agencies are involved, including local authorities, children's social care, youth justice services, youth custody, the police, Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), community and youth organisations, and health services. Children's families and communities are also crucial. However, the education system – through schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings – can play a central role because:

- 1. Education settings can provide safe, trusted spaces for children.** Last year, 82% of 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales said they felt safe at school, while only 5% believed school to be unsafe.⁵
- 2. Education settings can offer evidence-based support to reduce children's involvement in violence.** Where resources are available, these settings can offer mentoring, sports, social and emotional skills development, relationship violence prevention activities and more. These activities can help keep children safe from violence.⁶
- 3. Education settings safeguard children by identifying problems, providing support and signposting to specialist help.** As the one service that all children should interact with, they are well-placed to notice issues early and provide well-informed responses.⁷

What is included in this guidance?

This guidance report provides eight recommendations to education policymakers. In 2024, the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) published Education Practice Guidance, targeted at school, college and AP/EOTAS leaders. It outlined five evidence-based recommendations to help education leaders improve everyday practices to better protect children from involvement in violence.⁸

However, headteachers do not control funding, regulation and policy delivery across the education system. System-wide reforms

are also necessary to fully realise education's potential for keeping children safe.

All the recommendations propose changes to the education system in both England and Wales, except for Recommendation 3. This recommendation applies only to England, as it addresses Ofsted's recently announced reforms, which do not extend to Wales, where inspections are led by Estyn. Throughout, we aim to use statistics from both England and Wales. Where we have not, it is because the equivalent statistic for Wales is unavailable.

What evidence underpins this guidance?

This guidance report draws on the best available international evidence on how to prevent children's involvement in violence, including the YEF Toolkit. The YEF Toolkit uses rigorous, independent and systematic methods, drawing on over 2,000 studies to summarise the evidence associated with over 30 different approaches to preventing children's involvement in violence. Several of these approaches are school, college or AP-based strategies. The guidance also incorporates primary research conducted by the YEF, including evaluations of violence prevention programmes and large-scale surveys involving 10,000 teenage children and 9,500 teachers. The YEF also commissioned three reviews of practice and policy to inform the specific recommendations in this report.⁹

A consultative group of headteachers, academics and policy experts from across England and Wales has guided the development of this guidance, applying their knowledge of practice and policy to ensure the recommendations are feasible. Academic experts also suggested additional rigorous and relevant studies to inform the guidance. A full description of the evidence that underpins each recommendation can be found in the Evidence to Decision Framework published alongside this guidance.

Summary of recommendations

		COST
1	<p>Amend Pupil Premium guidance in England and Pupil Development Grant guidance in Wales to explicitly encourage schools and AP/EOTAS settings to invest in evidence-based violence reduction.</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education settings currently lack sufficient knowledge on how to reduce children's involvement in violence. • Violence and the fear of violence can negatively impact educational outcomes. 	£0
2	<p>Provide £100m of targeted funding over five years to deliver evidence-based violence reduction activities for children most at risk of involvement in violence (via SAFE or a new TARGET fund).</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of funding is preventing education settings from investing in evidence-based violence reduction activities to support the children who are most in need. • Violence is concentrated in specific areas, so funding should be targeted at high-violence areas. 	£100m (over five years)
3	<p>Amend Ofsted's proposed inspection toolkits to assess how settings support suspended children and safeguard children from violence.</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension and exclusion are key risk factors for later involvement in violence. The rates of both are rising, with clear racial disparities persisting. • Schools are not currently providing enough support to suspended children. • Education settings are uniquely placed to safeguard children from involvement in violence. However, they often fail to see violence as a safeguarding issue. 	£0
4	<p>Extend the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) for five years in England and begin piloting it in Wales (provided the evaluation shows positive results).</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in AP are at greater risk of involvement in violence. • APST uses co-location to provide evidence-informed support to children who need it most. 	£32m over five years in England £1.6m for a one-year pilot in Wales

COST**5 Pilot and scale up a violence against women and girls (VAWG) lead training grant in secondary schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings.****Why?**

- Far too many children are experiencing relationship violence.
- Relationship violence prevention activities can protect children from involvement in violence.
- Too few children report receiving lessons on topics such as consent, harassment and healthy relationships.
- Teachers currently lack the confidence and expertise to teach children about relationship violence.

£1m for a pilot in 50 settings

£35m for full scale up in England; £2m for full scale up in Wales

COST**6 Reform the current National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) to include a focus on protecting children from violence and establish a new NPQ for keeping children safe.****Why?**

- Education settings play a key role in safeguarding children from violence.
- Current safeguarding training fails to provide teachers and designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) with the confidence and knowledge to safeguard children who are involved in or impacted by violence.

£0 for NPQ reforms

To fund DSLs to complete the new NPQ in targeted settings: £2m in England, £100k in Wales

COST**7 Scale up impactful attendance improvement interventions and publish a strategy to improve attendance in AP in England and EOTAS in Wales.****Why?**

- Absence from education increases a child's risk of later involvement in violence (particularly for the most vulnerable children).
- Clear racial disparities in attendance rates persist.
- Attendance in AP is significantly worse compared to mainstream schools.

Cost of attendance improvement interventions to be updated in Autumn 2025

£0 for an AP/EOTAS strategy

COST**8 The Ministry of Justice, the Department for Education in England and the Welsh Government should publish a joint strategy to improve education received by children in custody across England and Wales.****Why?**

- Education in youth custody is unacceptably poor and requires urgent government attention.
- Providing high-quality education could reduce the likelihood of re-offending.
- There are clear racial disparities in the intake of youth custody; poor education, therefore, has a disproportionate impact on particular communities.

£0

Recommendation 1:

Amend Pupil Premium (PP) guidance in England and Pupil Development Grant (PDG) guidance in Wales to explicitly encourage schools and AP/EOTAS settings to invest in evidence-based violence reduction.

Why?

- Education settings currently lack sufficient knowledge on how to reduce children's involvement in violence.
- Violence and the fear of violence can negatively impact educational outcomes.

Education settings currently lack sufficient knowledge on how to reduce children's involvement in violence

In England, 70% of teachers report that they are 'not confident' or 'not at all confident' in identifying and delivering evidence-based interventions for preventing children's involvement in violence.¹⁰ Given the numerous demands on teachers' time and attention, this lack of confidence is understandable and unsurprising.

More specifically, a majority of teachers identify knife awareness lessons or assemblies (57%), police officers delivering classroom lessons (58%) and trauma-informed practice training (57%) as 'evidence-based strategies that can prevent children's involvement in violence'. There is currently no evidence to support the impact of these interventions on violence reduction.¹¹ Meanwhile, only 40% think cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is an evidence-

based strategy for violence reduction, despite this intervention being supported by evidence.^{12,13}

As noted, this lack of knowledge is entirely understandable; teachers have many priorities, and most professional development fails to address violence reduction (see Recommendation 6). However, this knowledge gap is leading to wasted resources. For instance, 47% of secondary teachers in England report that their school is delivering knife crime awareness assemblies or lessons.¹⁴ The money, time and attention spent on these sessions could be better invested in evidence-based interventions, such as mentoring, targeted sports provision, therapy and relationship violence prevention lessons.¹⁵



'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'.

Education policy expert interviewed for RAND's Education and Violence: a Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales, 2025¹⁶

Violence and the fear of violence can negatively impact educational outcomes

In 2024, 10% of children across England and Wales skipped school due to fears of violence, increasing to 26% for children who had been victims of violence.¹⁷ While schools remain safe places for most children, they are also where violence most commonly happens. Thirty-seven per cent of children who experienced violence in the past year say it happened in school during the school day. This is equivalent to 8% of all 13–17-year-olds. The next most likely location for violence was outside school, either before or after the school day (30% of victims).¹⁸ Over a fifth (22%)

of children across England and Wales also report that the fear of violence has taken a toll on their mental health, disrupting sleep, suppressing appetite and making it harder to focus in school.¹⁹

The prevalence of this violence and the impact of the fear of violence on children are likely affecting their academic attainment. Skipping school, struggling to focus, experiencing sleep disruptions and experiencing distraction and turmoil as a result of violence in school could all have a knock-on effect on academic performance.

Amend PP guidance in England and PDG guidance in Wales to explicitly encourage schools and AP/EOTAS settings to invest in evidence-based violence reduction

These problems can be addressed through revisions to PP and PDG guidance. Explicitly stating that settings can spend PP and PDG funding on evidence-based violence reduction activities, along with signposting to relevant evidence, will:

- a. Improve teachers' knowledge of evidence-based violence reduction.
- b. Support the primary goal of PP and PDG (which is to raise attainment for disadvantaged children) by addressing an existing barrier to learning.

The YEF could assist with the development of this guidance by drawing from our Education Practice Guidance and the YEF Toolkit, following the precedent of the support provided by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) for current PP and PDG guidance.²⁰ See table 1 for suggestions on specific changes to the guidance.

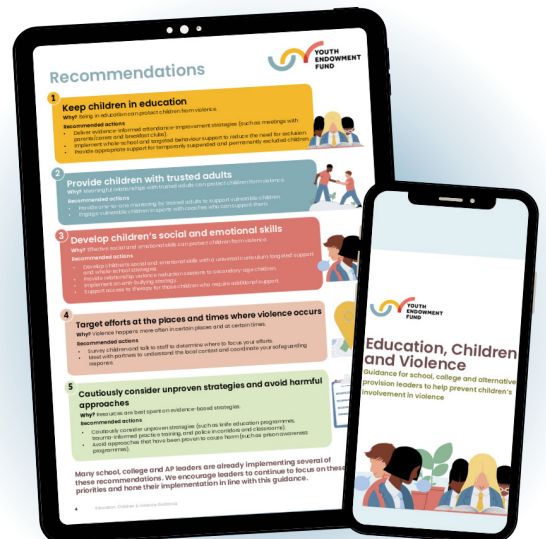


Table 1. Recommended changes to PP and PDG Guidance

Specific recommended changes to Using Pupil Premium: Guidance for School Leaders in England²¹

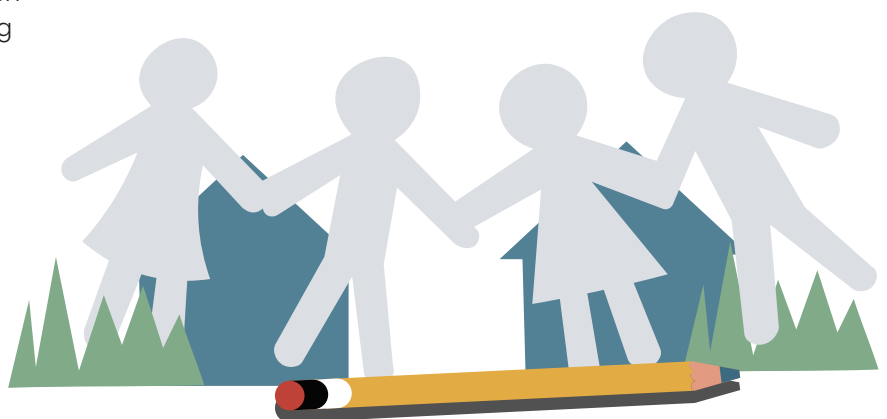
- Add the following to 'Wider strategies' in the 'Menu of approaches':
 - a. Strategies to prevent children's involvement in violence (such as mentoring, therapy and anti-bullying programmes).
 - b. Activities to reduce violence and harassment against girls.
- Add the YEF Education Practice Guidance and YEF Toolkit to the 'Using evidence' section. This will signpost leaders to the evidence base on school-based violence reduction.²²

Specific recommended changes to The Guide to the Pupil Development Grant in Wales²³

- Add a section on 'Preventing children's involvement in violence'. This should follow the 'Health and wellbeing of children and young people' section and should explain how violence could impact attainment, discuss the prevalence of violence in schools and introduce the evidence base (including the YEF Education Practice Guidance and YEF Toolkit) on how to prevent it.
- Embed violence reduction into the '4-stage process'. Protecting children from involvement in violence should be considered at each stage. For instance, YEF evidence should be included in the 'Evidence' stage alongside EEF's resources.

PP and PDG guidance already gives education leaders considerable flexibility in how funding can be allocated. In England, recognising the underlying non-academic causes of the attainment gap, the 'Menu of approaches' available for schools includes supporting children's social, emotional and behavioural needs; improving attendance; and providing extracurricular activities (e.g. sports).²⁴ Similarly, in Wales, PDG funding can be used to improve the delivery of whole-school approaches to developing children's social and emotional skills and providing access to trusted adults.²⁵ Indeed, the Department for Education (DfE) in England already cites YEF Toolkit evidence in a best-practice example of a PP secondary school strategy statement (suggesting investment in CBT for children who require specific support in regulating their behaviour and emotions).²⁶

Early intervention and support from schools are critical to achieving the Safer Streets mission. As one of the UK government's five core missions, this initiative aims to halve knife crime and violence against women and girls (VAWG) within a decade. Such an ambitious target requires support from several sectors, including making the best use of the £2.9 billion investment in PP and the £128 million spent on the PDG.^{27,28}



Recommendation 2:

Provide £100 million of targeted funding over five years to deliver evidence-based violence reduction activities for children most at risk of involvement in violence (via SAFE or a new TARGET fund).

Why?

- A lack of funding is preventing education settings from investing in evidence-based violence reduction activities to support the children who are most in need.
- Violence is concentrated in specific areas, so funding should be targeted at high-violence areas.

A lack of funding is preventing education settings from investing in evidence-based violence reduction activities to support the children who are most in need

Schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings across England and Wales are under considerable budgetary pressure, particularly in terms of supporting vulnerable children.²⁹ In England, 76% of school senior leaders report not having enough funding to support disadvantaged children.³⁰ Similarly, in Wales, 100% of school leaders surveyed by NAHT Cymru revealed that they currently did not receive enough funding to meet the needs of all their pupils.³¹

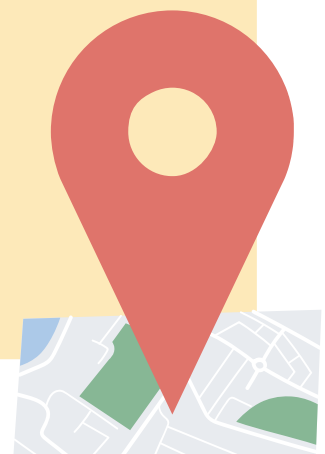
This situation is exacerbated by the increasingly complex needs exhibited by children. The number of children living in poverty rose by 20% between 2011 and 2023,³² the prevalence of probable mental health disorders increased from one in eight children

in 2017 to one in six in 2022,³³ and COVID-19 has had a lasting impact on attendance rates of children (see Recommendation 7).

Despite investment in some areas, such as children and young people's mental health services, increasing demand is placing growing pressure on the services surrounding schools.³⁴ External support to schools, such as mental health services, has been unable to keep pace with this demand,³⁵ while significant reductions in real-terms funding for local authorities have reduced the support available from other partners, such as the youth sector.³⁶ In this context, education settings are struggling to meet the needs of their most vulnerable children.³⁷

Violence is concentrated in specific areas, so funding should be targeted at high-violence areas

Violence is concentrated in particular places called hotspots. In England, 50% of violent crime happens in just 2% of street segments. In London, nearly 70% of knife-related homicides happen within just 1% of geographic areas. This pattern is backed up by a recent review of international research, which found that, on average, 50% of crime happens in just 4.5% of streets.³⁸ Therefore, where funding is limited, it is imperative to focus resources on areas with high levels of violence.



Provide £100 million of targeted funding over five years to deliver evidence-based violence reduction activities for children most at risk of involvement in violence

There are two mechanisms through which the UK government could target funding to ensure that education settings have the resources to deliver evidence-based violence reduction interventions to the children who need them most:

1. Extend the SAFE task forces (and pilot them in Wales)

In 2021, the DfE in England announced a £30 million investment in the SAFE task force programme in 10 local authority areas.³⁹ These areas were identified as the top 10 serious violence hotspots.⁴⁰

Led by mainstream schools or local authorities, SAFE brings together school leaders across primary, secondary and AP settings to work with local partners, such as children’s social care, VRUs and voluntary sector organisations, to assess the local violence problem and commission interventions to reduce children’s involvement in violence.

Supported by evidence-based guidance from the DfE (grounded in the YEF Toolkit) and following a local strategic needs analysis, local SAFE taskforce teams commission interventions that have moderate or high

evidence of impact on violence, or high evidence of impact on related outcomes (including school attendance, behaviour, and social and emotional wellbeing). The programme aims to work with children in Years 7 to 9 who are known to be involved in serious violence; are in close proximity to serious violence within their peer groups, families or neighbourhoods; or are starting to disengage from education.⁴¹

SAFE represents a good option for violence reduction. However, we still need to evaluate its impact robustly. YEF has, therefore, funded an impact evaluation of SAFE that will assess its impact on pupil suspensions, absences and exclusions and explore its impact on the number of violent offences in the local authority area. The evaluation report is expected in 2026.

Upon receipt of these results, the DfE should consider funding the extension and expansion of SAFE in England. Specifically:

- Extending funding for a further five years to provide long-term support
- Expanding the scope of the programme to support children up to age 18. As the age-crime curve illustrates, children are at the greatest risk of involvement in violence during late adolescence (with the murder offending rate peaking at 18–20 in England and Wales).⁴²

On current cost estimates, extending for a further five years and expanding the scope to 11–18-year-olds would cost c.£100 million.

The Welsh Government should also consider the evaluation findings and assess whether they justify piloting SAFE in Wales.



2. Establish a new TARGET fund (Tackling Aggression, Reducing violence, Guiding Education and Teachers)

Extending and expanding the existing SAFE task forces would be the ideal mechanism for targeting funding. SAFE has already been shown to be deliverable and feasible. However, if the evaluation does not demonstrate positive findings, targeted funding will still be needed to support education settings in providing evidence-based violence prevention interventions to the most vulnerable children.



If SAFE fails to show positive findings, the UK government should identify the 200 secondary schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings across England and Wales in the areas with the highest levels of violence and provide them with ringfenced funding to spend on violence reduction. Care should be taken when selecting schools, and the government may opt to identify clusters of schools in serious violence hotspots. Providing these settings with £100,000 annually for five years would cost £100 million and enable them to deliver various interventions, which may include:⁴³

- Employing a mentor to provide weekly, long-term mentoring to vulnerable children, such as those who have been suspended.
- Offering regular sports sessions between 3 and 6 pm to protect children from violence when they are most at risk.
- Delivering a targeted social and emotional skills development programme.
- Training teachers or paying external expert organisations to deliver relationship violence prevention sessions.
- Providing evidence-based therapy to children who need it.

Funding should be accompanied by evidence-based guidance that draws from the YEF’s Education Practice Guidance and provides advice on how to effectively commission interventions.⁴⁴ The UK government should stagger the introduction of the funding to enable a causal evaluation of its impact on violence, offending and educational outcomes.

It is critical that colleges and AP/EOTAS settings are included in this funding. Colleges and sixth forms have been particularly hit by cuts to real-terms per-pupil funding since 2010.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, children in AP settings are at greater risk; between 2012 and 2015, 14% of KS4 children in AP settings in England had previously been (or went on to be) cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence (compared to only 1% of all children).⁴⁶

Reinvesting savings from falling pupil numbers

Total pupil numbers in primary and secondary schools in England are projected to fall – from a peak of 7.57 million in 2022–23 – at an average rate of 1% annually until they reach 7.14 million in 2028–29. This means that even if per-pupil funding increases by 0.5% per year, overall funding would still fall by £1 billion by 2029–30.⁴⁷

The government should view this £1bn as a saving that can be reinvested into education, **and this recommendation could be achieved by reinvesting only 10% of the savings.**

There is a similar trend in Wales. There were 465,840 pupils in local-authority-maintained schools in January 2024, down 4,032 compared to the previous year.⁴⁸

Recommendation 3:

Amend Ofsted's proposed inspection toolkits to assess how settings support suspended children and safeguard children from violence.

Why?

- Suspension and exclusion are key risk factors for later involvement in violence. The rates of both are rising, with clear racial disparities persisting.
- Schools are not currently providing enough support to suspended children.
- Education settings are uniquely placed to safeguard children from involvement in violence. However, they often fail to see violence as a safeguarding issue.

Suspension and exclusion are key risk factors for later involvement in violence. The rates of both are rising, with clear racial disparities persisting

Being suspended or excluded places children at greater risk of later involvement in violence. Even when accounting for a range of contextual factors (including behaviour), suspended or excluded children are more than twice as likely to perpetrate violence and almost five times as likely to offend.⁴⁹ Recent studies also point to a potentially causal link between exclusion and offending,⁵⁰ while studies of serious case reviews identify suspension and exclusion as 'trigger points' for risk of serious harm.⁵¹

The use of suspension and exclusion in England is rising. In 2021–22, suspensions in England reached a record high rate of 6.9 suspensions per 100 pupils (equating to 578,280 suspensions); in 2022–23, they increased again to a rate of 9.3 (786,961

suspensions). These rates compare to a pre-pandemic rate of 5.4 (438,265 suspensions) in 2018–19.⁵² Repeated suspensions for children are also common and rising; in the autumn term 2023–24, among the pupils who were suspended, 59% were suspended once, 32% were suspended two to four times, and 9% were suspended five or more times within the term. The number of children suspended at least once also rose by 28% between autumn term 2022–23 and autumn term 2023–24.⁵³

In 2022–23, the permanent exclusion rate was 0.11% (equating to 9,376 permanent exclusions) compared to a pre-pandemic rate of 0.10% (7,894 exclusions) in 2018–19.

Racial disparities in suspension and exclusion rates also persist. Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish Traveller heritage, White and Black Caribbean children, and Black Caribbean children are most likely to be excluded or suspended.⁵⁴

Schools are not currently providing enough support to suspended children

Deciding whether to suspend or exclude a child is challenging and requires headteachers to carefully balance the needs of the child with those of the wider school community. Headteachers currently think they are getting this balance right; only 2% of headteachers in England believe the suspension rate is too high.⁵⁵ Without knowing the cause of rising suspensions, it would be wrong to call for a reduction in suspensions. Headteachers may be taking appropriate action in response to worsening behaviour.



Instead, greater focus should be placed on what happens to children once they are suspended or excluded, as the provision of support is not currently adequate.

When children in England are suspended for five days or less, the DfE advises that schools design a reintegration strategy to support their return to school and hold a reintegration meeting (with parents attending if possible). The DfE also advises schools to consider a range of support (including setting and marking schoolwork, daily contact with a designated pastoral professional in school, report cards with personalised targets, mentoring and academic catch-up support).⁵⁶ Of course, suspensions can be challenging to handle, while school leaders have an abundance of priorities across school to contend with. However, the provision of this support for suspended children is very limited.

When asked in February 2025 about the last child they suspended for between two and five days:

- Only 30% of headteachers and senior leaders in England reported setting and marking schoolwork.
- Only 24% assigned a pastoral staff member to check in with the child daily.
- Very few provided intensive support once the child returned (only 7% provided a mentor; only 9% offered academic catch-up support).
- Less than a third (31%) assessed the child's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or health needs.
- Only 17% reported providing a report card with targets to support the child upon their return.
- While 67% reported holding a reintegration meeting with parents, less than half (49%) designed a reintegration strategy.⁵⁷

Suspended children also report a lack of support. Of 1,300 children surveyed in 2024 who reported previously being suspended:

- Only 27% received a phone call from school each day they were suspended.
- Only 29% were set schoolwork.
- Only 6% received a mentor.⁵⁸

If a child is suspended for longer than five days, schools are expected to arrange for appropriate AP. However, children also frequently lack adequate support during this process. Only half of children, parents/carers and AP professionals believe that children are provided with the right support when moving between schools and AP.⁵⁹ Schools' approaches to commissioning and liaising with AP also require improvement.

Headteachers were asked in January 2025, 'Think of the last child you referred to off-site AP for part-time or full-time provision'. Only:

- Forty-four per cent visited the setting.
- Fifty-one per cent shared information regarding the child's needs and context.
- Twelve per cent ensured the curriculum continued from the child's previous learning.
- Forty per cent held regular review meetings with the child in AP.
- Thirty-three per cent held reintegration meetings when the child returned.
- Eighteen per cent provided a mentor when the child returned to school.⁶⁰

Schools must improve their relationships with AP settings and the monitoring and support they provide to children they have placed in AP.

Education settings are uniquely placed to safeguard children from involvement in violence. However, they often fail to see violence as a safeguarding issue

Education is the one service that all children are expected to attend, giving these settings a unique opportunity to understand children and their families and influence children's lives. Indeed, in 2023–24, schools were the second-largest referrers of cases to children's social care (after the police), making close to 126,000 referrals in England.⁶¹ Schools also closely monitor and impact a range of outcomes that are associated with risk factors for later engagement in violence, including absence, behaviour, and social and emotional skills.

Statutory safeguarding guidance across England and Wales recognises the vital role that education settings play. It requires these settings to ensure appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and actively used, engage in their role in multi-agency work, proactively share information and actions, ensure staff undergo appropriate training and create cultures where children feel safe to speak out and share any concerns they have.⁶² Statutory safeguarding guidance also makes explicit reference to education settings' role in protecting children from involvement in violence.⁶³

However, despite this, education settings (and local safeguarding partnerships) often fail to see serious violence as a safeguarding issue.

In 2023 and 2024, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) carried out six joint targeted area inspections on serious violence. These inspections examined how local agencies, including education settings, were working to protect children from involvement in violence and whether children were being effectively safeguarded. They concluded: 'A failure to consistently identify serious youth violence as a safeguarding issue is leaving too many children at serious risk of harm'.⁶⁴

In addition, a recent review of education's role in safeguarding children from violence found that the lack of a clear, consistent definition of serious violence in statutory guidance, was hampering settings from prioritising and addressing serious violence as a safeguarding concern.⁶⁵

Amend Ofsted's proposed school inspection toolkit and independent school inspection toolkit to assess how schools support suspended children and safeguard children from violence⁶⁶

Ofsted recently closed its consultation on a new approach to school inspections, introducing new inspection toolkits that detail the evaluation areas that inspections will focus on and how schools will be graded. Currently, these toolkits overlook two crucial areas:

- The support provided to suspended children
- The measures taken by school leaders to safeguard children from violence

Table 2. Specific changes required to Ofsted’s school inspection toolkit and independent school inspection toolkit

School suspension: two tweaks to the proposed inspection toolkit

A school is currently proposed to be rated as ‘secure’ for ‘inclusive behaviour culture, policy and practice’ if it adheres to the following: *‘Sanctions, including suspension and exclusion, are used proportionately, effectively and as a last resort to tackle behaviour that does not reflect the school’s high expectations’.*

Two new paragraphs should be added here:

- a. *‘Where a child is suspended for five days or less, the school provides support to keep the child engaged with school and well-prepared for reintegration. The child is then supported to reintegrate upon their return’.*
- b. *‘Where a child is suspended and spends a period in alternative provision, the school liaises closely with the AP setting, sharing relevant information and remaining in close contact.’.*



Safeguarding from violence: two tweaks to the proposed inspection toolkit

The proposed school inspection toolkit (and independent school equivalent) features a section on safeguarding. This includes an introduction and six safeguarding areas on which schools will be judged as either meeting or not meeting the expected criteria. One of these areas is child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Two tweaks to this safeguarding section are required:

- a. Expand and simplify the language in the ‘child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment’ section to instead read ‘child-on-child violence’. It is imperative that schools are held accountable for how they protect children from sexual violence and harassment; however, there is no clear justification for specifying one form of violence while excluding others.

The section heading should be changed, and the underpinning text should then provide a clear definition of violence, specifically: *‘Leaders and those responsible for safeguarding fulfil their responsibilities in relation to child-on-child violence as set out in ‘Working together to safeguard children’ and ‘Keeping children safe in education’. Child-on-child violence includes (but is not limited to) bullying, physical abuse (including physical assault and harm [or the threat of harm] with a weapon), sexual violence and harassment, and domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse)’.*

- b. Include ‘violence’ in the introductory section. This would be a very small addition: *‘This can include, but is not limited to, neglect, abuse (including by peers), violence, grooming, exploitation, sexual abuse and online harm’.*

Amend Ofsted's proposed further education and skills inspection toolkit to assess how settings safeguard children from violence

Ofsted is proposing a toolkit for further education and skills that includes a safeguarding section. In this section, providers will be evaluated on whether they have 'met' or 'not met' the expected safeguarding standards. One of the themes focuses on 'learners under 18 and those up to the age of 25 with an education, health and care plan'.

It currently reads:

'Leaders, staff and/or those responsible for governance know and fulfil the statutory requirements for safeguarding.'

Leaders keep learners safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism in accordance with the "Prevent" duty.'



A third statement should be added here:

'Leaders and those responsible for safeguarding should keep learners safe from violence. This includes (but is not limited to) bullying, physical abuse (including physical assault and harm [or the threat of harm] with a weapon), sexual violence and harassment, and domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse).'

Recommendation 4:

Extend the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) for five years in England and begin piloting it in Wales (provided the evaluation shows positive results).

Why?

- Children in AP are at greater risk of involvement in violence.
- APST uses co-location to provide evidence-informed support to children who need it most.

Children in AP are at greater risk of involvement in violence

There are approximately 74,000 children in AP in England⁶⁷ and 2,600 in EOTAS in Wales.⁶⁸ These children are at significantly greater risk of involvement in violence compared to children in mainstream education settings.

Between 2012 and 2015, 14% of KS4 children in AP in England had previously been (or went on to be) cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence (compared to only 1% of all children).^{69, 70}

APST uses co-location to provide evidence-informed support to children who need it most

The APST programme aims to embed teams of specialists in 22 AP schools in serious violence hotspots across England. Funded by the DfE, the intervention places the following professionals to work in AP settings for at least three days a week (with at least two days of overlap when the entire team is present):

- Speech and language therapist
- Mental health professional
- Post-16 transition coach
- Youth worker
- Educational psychologist
- Family support worker
- Youth justice worker
- Social worker



AP settings can then decide whether the support provided by these professionals is offered to all children or targeted at particularly vulnerable children. The programme theorises that placing these professionals in a setting where they often would not have been previously and meeting children where they are enables AP settings to better support children with evidence-informed support, such as therapy or mentoring. Additionally, this approach facilitates integrated support, with all services working collaboratively.

APST represents a good option for protecting children from involvement in violence by providing evidence-informed support to children at heightened risk. There is also increasing support for the co-location of services in education settings to better address the needs of children, particularly those with SEND.⁷¹ It is unsurprising that the majority of mainstream school headteachers in England surveyed in January 2025 expressed a desire for additional on-site support from mental health professionals (67%), family support workers (62%), speech and language therapists (65%) and educational psychologists (75%).⁷² APST is an implementable model of co-location aimed at children at heightened risk of involvement in violence.

‘Several of our interviewees working in AP and PRU settings highlighted the importance of providing multi-disciplinary 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.’

RAND Europe, Education and Violence: a Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales, 2025⁷³

However, APST still requires robust evaluation. YEF has, therefore, funded an evaluation of APST that attempts to ascertain its impact on a range of relevant outcomes, including reintegration back into mainstream school, attendance, post-16 destinations and behavioural difficulties. The evaluation report will be published in the summer of 2025.⁷⁴

Extend APST for five years in England and begin piloting it in Wales (provided the evaluation shows positive results)

If the evaluation results show a positive impact on children, the DfE in England should extend APST for five years at a cost of £32m.

Extending APST could positively impact race equity (as Black Caribbean children and Black Caribbean and White children are currently over-represented in the AP sector) and support children with SEND, who are also over-represented in AP.⁷⁵

Upon receiving the evaluation findings, the Welsh Government should consider funding and piloting a similar programme in some of the 22 pupil referral units (PRUs) in Wales. Welsh government may opt to start on a smaller scale, and we would advise liaison with the APST evaluation team and the DfE in England to learn from their experience with APST. A one-year pilot and accompanying evaluation in five PRUs would cost approximately £1.6 million.⁷⁶



Recommendation 5:

Pilot and scale up a violence against women and girls (VAWG) lead training grant in secondary schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings.

Why?

- Far too many children are experiencing relationship violence.
- Relationship violence prevention activities can protect children from involvement in violence.
- Too few children report receiving lessons on topics such as consent, harassment and healthy relationships.
- Teachers currently lack the confidence and expertise to teach children about relationship violence.

Far too many children are experiencing relationship violence

Twenty-seven per cent of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales report having been in a romantic relationship over the past year. Among these, nearly half (49%) have experienced violent or controlling behaviours from their partners.⁷⁷

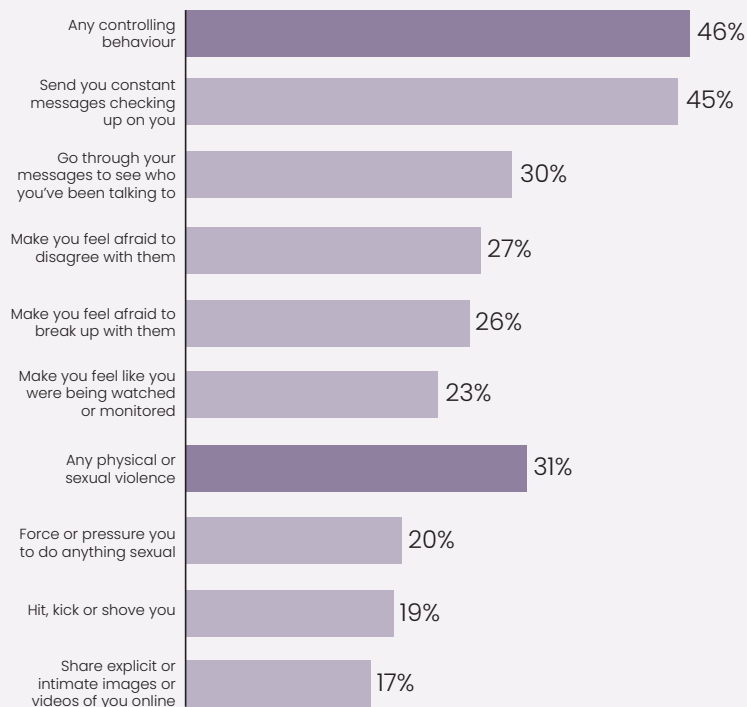
This includes controlling behaviours:

- Forty-five per cent receive text messages where their partner checks up on them.
- Thirty per cent report that their partner goes through their phone.
- Twenty-three per cent feel like their partner is watching or monitoring them.

And violent behaviours:

- Thirty-one per cent experience physical or sexual violence.
- Twenty per cent are forced or pressured to do anything sexual.
- Nineteen per cent are hit, kicked or shoved.⁷⁸

The proportion of children in relationships who've experienced violent and controlling behaviour



Relationship violence prevention activities can protect children from involvement in violence

Dating and relationship violence prevention activities (including lessons, training for staff and school-wide awareness campaigns) can protect children from involvement in violence (reducing violence by an average of 17%).⁷⁹

The most impactful type of these activities is lessons that are delivered to children and aim to challenge unhealthy attitudes about appropriate behaviours in relationships, build interpersonal relationship skills and improve children's ability to identify warning signs that a relationship might lead to violence.

These lessons should also be accompanied by whole-setting strategies and initiatives to prevent dating, relationship and gender-based violence.⁸⁰



Too few children report receiving lessons on topics such as consent, harassment and healthy relationships

Despite the importance of these activities, too many children report that they are currently missing out on them. While 76% of 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales report receiving some form of education on dating and relationships in the past year, the reach of these lessons is uneven.

Critical topics – such as sexual consent and harassment – have only reached about half of 13–17-year-olds, with 55% reporting receiving lessons on consent and 43% on harassment. Only 40% say they have received

lessons on how to be in healthy and respectful romantic relationships. Children who admit to perpetrating sexual violence are even less likely to say they have received lessons on consent and harassment (only 39% and 31%, respectively).⁸¹

More broadly, less than half (48%) of secondary school teachers in England who were surveyed in December 2024 report that their school is delivering teacher-led lessons on reducing relationship violence.⁸²

Teachers currently lack the confidence and expertise to teach children about relationship violence

Relationship violence prevention lessons are most commonly taught through PSHE/RSHE. Improvements have been made in the teaching of these subjects in England, particularly since RSHE was made statutory in secondary schools in England 2020.⁸³ However, significant gaps in teacher confidence and expertise persist.

In a January 2025 survey, 55% of secondary teachers in England cited 'teacher confidence and/or expertise' as a main barrier to delivering high-quality PSHE/RSHE in their schools.⁸⁴ Among teachers who teach these subjects, there are clear confidence gaps. Of the secondary teachers who reported teaching RSHE:

- Over a quarter reported not being confident in teaching children how to leave an unhealthy relationship (27%) or teaching children how to spot warning signs in relationships (26%).
- Almost half (45%) reported not being confident in teaching children how to intervene if they witness a sexual assault.⁸⁵

These confidence gaps are unsurprising given that almost a third (31%) of secondary teachers delivering these lessons have never received training on how to teach PSHE or RSHE (with a further 26% receiving training more than a year ago).⁸⁶

'...there is still a sizable minority who are not receiving timely CPD. More can be done to improve the availability and accessibility of RSHE CPD...', while '...more needs to be done by schools to ensure teacher training needs are being identified. Teachers wanted more externally delivered training as well as training on more specific and complex topics'

Department for Education, England, Relationships, sex and health education: Implementation of the 2020 curriculum guidance in school, 2024⁸⁷

Children notice these confidence gaps. As one young person told YEF's Peer Action Collective last year,

'You've got to understand that with PSHE, teachers aren't qualified teachers in PSHE ... So, until teachers are confident in themselves teaching PSHE, pupils are not going to have any confidence in our teachers'.⁸⁸



The government should pilot and scale up a VAWG lead training grant in secondary schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS.

Both the DfE in England and the Welsh Government should pilot and evaluate a secondary school, college and AP/EOTAS VAWG lead training grant. In England, there is a clear precedent in the Senior Mental Health Lead Training grant. This provides schools with a £1,200 grant to pay for DfE quality-assured training for a senior member of school or college staff to train as a mental health lead.⁸⁹ In addition, in Wales, this investment would also further supplement the new curriculum and the relationship and sexuality education code.⁹⁰

An initial pilot of the VAWG lead training grant should provide secondary schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings with £8,000 each. This should be used to:

- **Appoint an existing staff member as a VAWG lead who will design and deliver an anti-VAWG whole-setting strategy.** Crucially, this lead should have an interest in and a willingness to undertake this role.⁹¹ The strategy would include reviewing whole-setting policies, providing information and training for staff, engaging children about how safe they feel and how safety can be improved, leading whole-setting anti-VAWG awareness campaigns and ensuring that PSHE/RSHE covers key VAWG topics. Settings would not need to use the term VAWG when communicating with children and could explain that relationship violence impacts both girls and boys.⁹²
- **Purchase training for the VAWG lead from a list of government-approved providers.**⁹³ This could either be a new National Professional Qualification (NPQ) focused on keeping children safe (see Recommendation 6) or a specific training programme on how to address VAWG and provide relationship violence prevention lessons to children. The government would need to design a framework for training and appoint a list of approved providers.
- **Deliver at least five relationship violence prevention lessons to Year 9 children (and 16-17 year olds in Colleges).** Depending on their expertise and capacity, settings could opt to deliver lessons themselves and use the grant to train up to six teachers (at a cost of £1,200 each). Alternatively, they could fund the training of one teacher as a VAWG lead and then use the remainder of the grant to fund an external provider for these sessions.⁹⁴ The government would need to map the market and identify suitable providers who could deliver the lessons.

A £1 million investment could pilot and evaluate the VAWG lead training grant in 50 schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings.⁹⁵ The pilot should explore the feasibility of the grant, and whether £8,000 per setting is sufficient. If successful, scaling it up to every secondary school and college, and 500 secondary AP settings in England would cost £35 million. Delivering in all secondary schools, colleges, and Pupil Referral Units in Wales would cost £2 million.⁹⁶ Any scale-up should be staged to allow for a robust, causal evaluation of the VAWG lead training grant.

Recommendation 6:

Reform the current National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) to include a focus on protecting children from violence and establish a new NPQ for keeping children safe.

Why?

- Education settings play a key role in safeguarding children from violence.
- Current safeguarding training fails to provide teachers and designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) with the confidence and knowledge to safeguard children who are involved in or impacted by violence.

Education settings play a key role in safeguarding children from violence

As noted in Recommendation 3, serious violence is a safeguarding issue, and education settings play a crucial role in safeguarding children from involvement in violence. Education is the one service that all children should engage with. Educators are well-placed to notice when issues arise and can provide a safe environment and supportive culture to protect children.

Statutory safeguarding guidance across England and Wales recognises the vital role that education settings play. It requires these settings to ensure appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and actively used, engage in their role in multi-agency work, proactively share information and actions, ensure staff undergo appropriate training and create cultures where children feel safe to speak out and share any concerns they have.⁹⁷ Statutory safeguarding guidance also makes explicit reference to education settings' role in protecting children from involvement in violence.⁹⁸



Current safeguarding training fails to provide teachers and DSLs with the confidence and knowledge to safeguard children who are involved in or impacted by violence

Keeping Children Safe in Education requires that 'all staff [in England] undergo safeguarding and child protection training'; DSLs must undergo training every two years. All staff and DSLs should also refresh their knowledge (via online learning and refresher meetings) at regular intervals.⁹⁹ Keeping Learners Safe has the same requirements for teachers in Wales.¹⁰⁰ Teaching staff receive this training from a variety of sources, including charities (e.g. the NSPCC), local authorities and professional bodies, while some schools, colleges, AP and EOTAS settings deliver their own training to staff.

However, the training offered in England is failing to adequately cover serious violence and how teachers (and DSLs) can protect children from involvement in violence. In a December 2024 survey, 82% of teachers, 72% of DSLs and 77% of deputy DSLs in England report receiving no training on serious violence in the last two years.¹⁰¹ This is contributing to critical gaps in teacher and DSL knowledge. Keeping Children Safe in Education stipulates that:

All staff should be aware of the indicators, which may signal children are at risk from, or are involved with, serious violent crime'.¹⁰²

However, almost a third of teachers in England (30%) who were surveyed in December 2024 report that they are 'not confident' or 'not at all confident' in identifying a child who is involved in or at risk of becoming involved in serious violent crime. Even among DSLs and deputy DSLs, there are gaps: 11% of DSLs and 15% of deputy DSLs are 'not confident' or 'not at all confident'.¹⁰³

'The availability and quality of training around serious violence for education staff is variable, and staff report a lack of confidence in identifying children at risk of serious violence.'

CfEY and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales, 2025¹⁰⁴

Reform existing NPQs to include a focus on preventing children's involvement in violence^{105, 106}

The DfE in England recently announced a review of NPQs.¹⁰⁷ This presents an opportunity to improve teachers' and leaders' understanding of how to protect children from involvement in violence. We recommend that new content is added to the following NPQs in England:

- Leading behaviour and culture
- Senior leadership
- Headship
- Executive leadership

NPQs in England are currently underpinned by frameworks that stipulate what participants should learn. These are separated into evidence-based 'learn that' and 'learn how to' statements. Providers then use these statements to produce NPQ content. We recommend the addition of the following 'learn that' and 'learn how to' statements, all of which are supported by robust evidence:

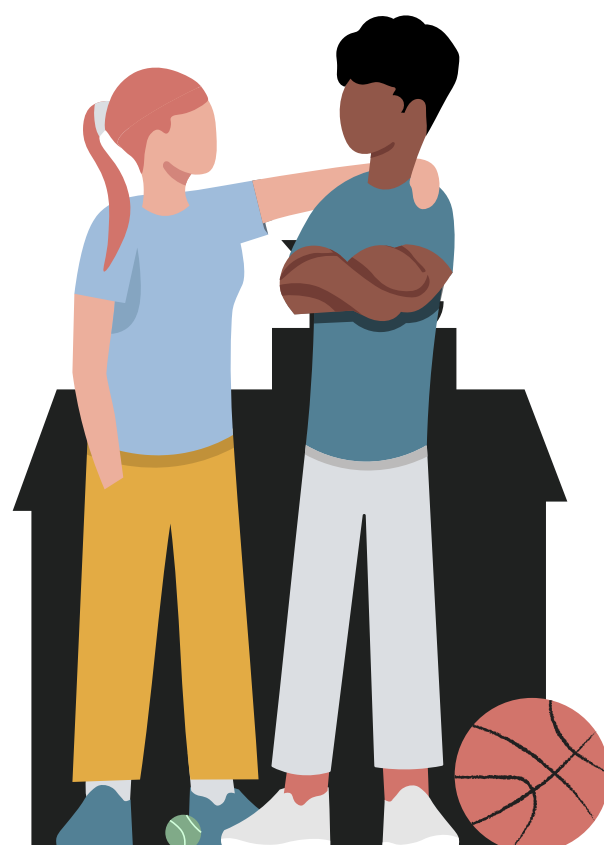


Table 3. 'Learn that' and 'learn how to' statements for a module on 'preventing children's involvement in violence'

Learn that:

- Violence is the use or threat of intentional physical force. It can include murder, physical assault, sexual assault, harm (or the threat of harm) with a weapon and robbery.
- Violence is unacceptably common, with 20% of teenagers in England and Wales reporting being victims of violence in the last year.¹⁰⁸
- Relationship violence in teenage relationships is prevalent. Half of 13–17 year olds in relationships have experienced violent or controlling behaviours from their partners; nearly one third (31%) experience physical or sexual violence.¹⁰⁹
- School is seen as a safe place by most children, but it is also where violence most commonly happens.¹¹⁰
- Schools, colleges and alternative provision settings play a critical protective role in preventing children's involvement in violence.¹¹¹
- Particular children are at greater risk of involvement in violence, such as those who have been suspended or excluded, those who have spent time in alternative provision settings, those with severe absenteeism and those who have previously offended¹¹².
- Violence is preventable.¹¹³ And there are several evidence-based interventions that can prevent children's involvement in violence, including mentoring, social skills training, targeted sports provision, therapy and relationship violence prevention activities.¹¹⁴
- Children are at greatest risk of involvement in violence immediately after school (between 4 and 6 pm).¹¹⁵
- Serious violence is concentrated in a small number of places. It is important that education settings know where these places are and target support there.¹¹⁶
- Crime and violence typically peak during late adolescence and early adulthood and then steadily decline. This phenomenon is often called 'the age-crime curve'.¹¹⁷

Learn how to:

- **Select, implement and monitor the delivery of evidence-based violence reduction interventions, including:**
 - ♦ Providing children at risk of involvement with violence with access to trusted adults (via one-to-one mentoring or targeted sports provision).
 - ♦ Developing children's social and emotional skills with a universal curriculum, targeted support and whole-school strategies.
 - ♦ Providing relationship violence prevention lessons to secondary-age children (accompanied by whole-setting strategies).
 - ♦ Implementing an evidence-based anti-bullying strategy.
 - ♦ Supporting access to therapy for children who require additional support.
- **Target efforts at the places and times where violence occurs by:**
 - ♦ Surveying children to establish when and where they feel unsafe.
 - ♦ Consulting staff to understand where violence is happening and particular concerns that are arising.
 - ♦ Meeting with local partners to understand the local context and co-ordinate your collective safeguarding response.
- **Avoid common pitfalls and wasted resource by:**
 - ♦ Cautiously considering unproven strategies, such as knife crime education programmes, trauma-informed practice training and police in corridors and classrooms.
 - ♦ Avoiding approaches that have been proven to cause harm, such as prison awareness programmes.¹¹⁸

The Welsh Government should also consult on adding this content to the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

Establish an NPQ on keeping children safe¹¹⁹

The DfE in England should also establish a new NPQ on keeping children safe. This would include a range of content, drawing on the YEF Education Practice Guidance and other sources of evidence. The framework would cover:

- **Preventing children’s involvement in violence.** This would include the ‘learn that’ and ‘learn how to’ statements in Table 3.
- **Preventing VAWG.** This would detail the prevalence of sexual abuse, harassment and relationship violence.¹²⁰ It would train teachers and leaders how to deliver whole-setting strategies to prevent VAWG, such as reviewing policies, training staff and delivering awareness campaigns.¹²¹ It would also cover how to survey and consult children to understand the particular challenges in their settings. Additionally, the module would teach participants how to deliver age-appropriate, engaging, relationship violence prevention lessons to children¹²² and how to teach children to be active bystanders.¹²³
- **Leading safeguarding.** An extension of Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children, this module would set out an evidence-based, standardised framework for best practice safeguarding training.
- **Behaviour.** Drawing on existing NPQ content, this module would focus on embedding good behaviour across settings to ensure children feel safe.
- **Keeping children in education.** This module would focus on evidence-informed attendance improvement strategies and how to ensure that suspended children receive high-quality support to enable their reintegration back into school.
- **Professional development.** Drawing on existing NPQ content, this would include how to train other teachers across settings to keep children safe and share the knowledge covered in the NPQ.
- **Implementation.** Drawing on existing NPQ content, this would teach participants how to implement the strategies learned across their settings.

The Welsh Government should consult on adding an NPQ (or similar qualification) to the suite of career-long professional learning opportunities available to teachers.¹²⁴

The government should fund secondary schools and colleges in high-violence areas and all AP settings to train DSLs on the keeping children safe NPQ

Under the current NPQ arrangements in England, the DfE provides scholarship funding to cover the full NPQ course cost for teachers from the top 50% of state-funded schools and 16–19 settings that have the highest proportion of disadvantaged children.¹²⁵

Following the establishment of a new NPQ on keeping children safe, the DfE in England should cover the full cost of the NPQ for a DSL in secondary schools and colleges in areas of high violence and in all AP settings. This has support in England. Fifty-nine per cent of teachers in England (and half of DSLs) surveyed in December 2024 agree that DSLs should undertake an NPQ.¹²⁶ The proposal is significantly more popular in secondary settings compared to primary settings: 72% of secondary teachers (and 64% of secondary heads) support it, compared to 45% of primary teachers (and 39% of primary heads).¹²⁷

Providing a consultation suggests that schools would support such a qualification, the Welsh Government should similarly provide targeted funding for DSPs to be trained in all PRUs and in the schools and colleges most at risk.

In England, providing this funding to the most at-risk secondary schools and colleges (in the top 20% of high violence areas) and to 500 AP settings would cost approximately £2 million. In Wales, this would cost approximately £100,000.¹²⁸

Recommendation 7:

Scale up impactful attendance improvement interventions and publish a strategy to improve attendance in AP in England and EOTAS in Wales.

Why?

- Absence from education increases a child's risk of later involvement in violence (particularly for the most vulnerable children).
- Clear racial disparities in attendance rates persist.
- Attendance in AP is significantly worse compared to mainstream schools.

Absence from education increases a child's risk of later involvement in violence (particularly for the most vulnerable children)

Even after controlling for a range of contextual factors (including children's behaviour), children who miss school more than 20% of the time are more than twice as likely to report later violent behaviour.¹²⁹ Indeed, being in education settings can reduce the risk that a child will become involved in serious violence.¹³⁰ Schools, colleges and AP can play a protective role by providing children with trusted adults, offering a safe environment, safeguarding them from harm and delivering a variety of approaches that make violence less likely.¹³¹

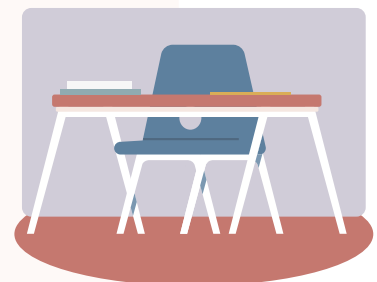
Consequently, the post-COVID rise in school and AP absence across England and Wales is alarming and places more children at risk of involvement in violence. In the autumn and spring terms of 2023–24, 19.2% of children in

England were persistently absent (absent more than 10% of the time), which is nearly double the rate in 2018–19 (10.5%).¹³² In Wales, almost a third (30.4%) of pupils were persistently absent in 2023–24, which has more than doubled since 2018/19 (14.7%).¹³³

Also alarming is the racial disparity in attendance rates, placing particular children at greater risk. For instance, a greater proportion of children of Gypsy and Roma Traveller, Irish Traveller heritage, White and Black Caribbean, Black Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Irish ethnicity are persistently absent when compared with the average in England.¹³⁴ In Wales, children of Gypsy and Roma Traveller and mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnicity have the poorest attendance rates.¹³⁵

'Attendance rates across Wales remain a concern, and the rates of persistent absenteeism have increased substantially.'

Estyn, Improving Attendance in Secondary Schools, 2024¹³⁶



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

A DSL in a further education college in the North West of England.

CfEY and MMU, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales, 2025*¹³⁷

The challenge for governments is the limited evidence base on effective strategies to improve children’s attendance.¹³⁸ Consequently, the YEF, in partnership with the DfE and EEF, has funded a range of evaluations in the past two years to test different approaches to improving attendance (See Table 4). Findings will begin to be published in 2025.

Table 4. Attendance improvement interventions being evaluated by the YEF and EEF

Attendance mentors

In October 2024, the DfE invested £15 million to expand the attendance mentors pilot programme. Delivered by Etio, the programme provides 12 weeks of mentoring to persistently and severely absent children in seven priority education investment areas (Blackpool, Portsmouth, Ipswich, Rochdale, Nottingham, Walsall and Norwich). Mentors aim to build trust with mentees, identify key barriers to attendance, set goals and develop action plans before implementing these attendance improvement plans and planning for reintegration back into school. YEF is evaluating the programme using a randomised controlled trial, which will assess the impact on attendance, behaviour, attainment, exclusions and suspensions. The evaluation report will be published in 2028.

BITUP

BITUP is a parent communication intervention aimed at improving pupils’ school attendance, delivered by the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT). The programme involves sending personalised text messages to parents and carers of Year 7–11 children, updating them on the number of days of school their child has missed over a 6–8 week period. BIT shares the template messages with schools and identifies pupils with below 95% attendance in the previous half term. After reviewing the list of pupil names to ensure it is appropriate for parents to receive the text messages, the school sends out the tailored messages. This process is repeated every half term and takes approximately two hours of administrative staff work each time.

YEF and EEF are co-funding the delivery and evaluation of BITUP. The evaluation report, a randomised controlled trial measuring the impact on attendance, will be published in the summer of 2025.¹³⁹

Attendance and family liaison officers (AFLOs)

The YEF and EEF have funded a quasi-experimental design evaluation that assesses the impact of AFLOs on KS3 and 4 children’s persistent absence, overall absence rate, unauthorised absence and exclusions.

AFLOs are typically employed to monitor attendance data and liaise with absent children, their families and other members of school staff. Some AFLOs may also conduct home visits and implement strategies to increase attendance. Just over half of secondary schools were employing AFLOs in 2022.

In addition to assessing the impact of employing an AFLO, the evaluation will explore the prevalence of AFLOs, the reasons why schools employ them and which models of AFLO delivery are associated with greater impact.¹⁴⁰

An evaluation report is expected in 2025.

Grassroots

Grassroots is an anti-conflict programme that aims to reduce bullying and conflict in schools by empowering pupils in Years 7–9 to positively impact their fellow pupils’ behaviours.

The programme begins by administering a survey to all pupils in Years 7–9. This survey asks children to identify up to 10 other children they have recently chosen to spend time with; the results are used to conduct a network analysis and identify the best-connected pupils in the school. Research assistants are then trained to convene groups of the most connected pupils (‘change makers’) for 10 fortnightly sessions. In these sessions, facilitators aim to help pupils identify and implement strategies for reducing conflict in school.¹⁴¹

The YEF and EEF are co-funding the delivery and evaluation of Grassroots. A randomised controlled trial is being used to measure the impact of the programme on school absence, behaviour, bullying and how safe children feel in school. The evaluation report will be published in autumn 2025.

If evaluations demonstrate positive results, the DfE in England and the Welsh Government should invest in their expansion and specifically target vulnerable children

Children with the highest levels of absence, those who have previously been suspended or excluded, those in AP (or EOTAS) and those who have had previous contact with the police should be prioritised for receiving these attendance improvement interventions.¹⁴²

This recommendation will be updated with an associated cost once evaluation results become available.

Attendance in AP/EOTAS is significantly worse compared to mainstream schools, highlighting the need for a government strategy

Children in AP in England are significantly more likely to be cautioned or sentenced for serious violence offences. Between 2012 and 2015, 14% of KS4 children in AP settings in England had previously been (or went on to be) cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence (compared to only 1% of all children).¹⁴³ Given this, it is very concerning that attendance rates in AP in England are considerably worse compared to mainstream schools. In the 2023–24 autumn to spring term, the unauthorised absence rate among all children in England was 2.2%. In AP, the rate was almost nine times higher, at 19.2%.¹⁴⁴ Estyn has also expressed concern regarding the attendance rate in PRUs in Wales.¹⁴⁵

The DfE in England must publish a strategy for improving attendance in AP, including annual targets for AP attendance, while the Welsh Government must do the same for EOTAS. Strategies should consider the findings from our soon-to-be-published evaluations on attendance and the EEF's Rapid Evidence Assessment on attendance.¹⁴⁶



Recommendation 8:

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the DfE in England and the Welsh Government should publish a joint strategy to improve education received by children in custody across England and Wales

Why?

- Education in youth custody is unacceptably poor and requires urgent government attention.
- Providing high-quality education could reduce the likelihood of re-offending.
- There are clear racial disparities in the intake of youth custody; poor education, therefore, has an inequitable impact on Black children and Gypsy and Roma Traveller children.

Education in youth custody is unacceptably poor and requires urgent government attention

In the year ending March 2024, there were, on average, 430 children in custody at any one time across England and Wales. Sixty-eight per cent of these children have committed violence against the person offences. Most of these children are held in young offender institutions (YOIs), where they should be entitled to receive education.¹⁴⁷ However, the standard of this education is very poor.

In October 2024, Ofsted and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) published a report detailing the 'decade of declining quality of education in YOIs'. The report cited poor relationships between education providers and YOI leaders, poor-quality resources and infrastructure, severe staff

shortages, and low levels of qualifications and training among staff as key factors contributing to the failure of these institutions to support children. These children are left poorly prepared for their release, lacking the skills and training that might help them secure employment.¹⁴⁸

Two-thirds of children released from custody go on to re-offend;¹⁴⁹ it is imperative that they receive high-quality education and support while in custody to support them in desisting from offending. Given that over two-thirds are in custody due to violent offences, supporting these children to desist from offending could have a significant impact on reducing their involvement in violence.

There are clear racial disparities in the intake of youth custody; poor education, therefore, has an inequitable impact on Black children and Gypsy and Roma Traveller children

These poor outcomes are disproportionately felt by Black children and Gypsy and Roma Traveller children due to the racial disproportionality in the number of children serving custodial sentences. Across England and Wales, Black children make up 6% of all 10–17-year-olds, but in 2023–24, they accounted for 24% of children in custody – four times more than their population share.¹⁵⁰ Gypsy and Roma Traveller children make up less than 1% of children, yet 7% of children in custody identify as being from Gypsy and Roma Traveller backgrounds – over seven times their population share.¹⁵¹



The MoJ, the DfE in England and the Welsh Government should publish a clear joint strategy to rapidly improve education received by children in custody

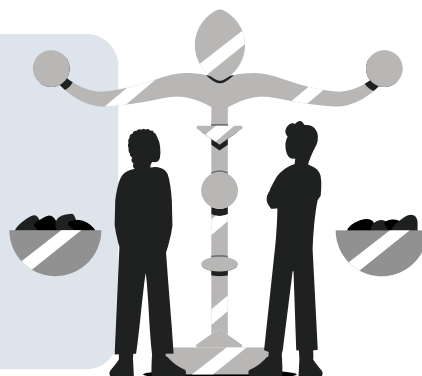
Ofsted and HMI Prisons call for a range of urgent actions, including:

- A significant reduction in the amount of time children are kept in their cells and away from education and purposeful activity.
- Prioritisation of children’s attendance at education.
- Improvements to the curriculum so that it supports children to develop employability.
- Improved reading strategies to ensure all children significantly improve reading skills.
- Recruitment of appropriately qualified and competent teaching staff.
- Provision of high-quality classroom accommodations and resources.¹⁵²

A required improvement worth highlighting is the need for education staff in YOIs to better support children with SEND. CfEY and the University of Oxford’s recently published review calls for government investment into training education staff in youth custody to better support children with SEND.¹⁵³

The Children’s Commissioner in England also recently called for urgent action on education in the children and young people’s secure estate. Their recommendations include:

- Providing genuine opportunities in secure settings to undertake traineeships and job training in the community.
- Involving the governors of secure settings in the procurement and commissioning of education providers and amending contracts to enable greater flexibility and authority for these settings to improve education.¹⁵⁴



There have been several false starts from the government in its attempts to address the problems in youth custody. Previous strategies for reform have failed, and despite a commitment in 2016 to close YOIs and replace them with secure schools, the pace of change has been slow (with only one secure school open).^{155, 156}

The solutions here are not easy, but YEF calls on the MoJ to partner with the DfE in England and the Welsh Government to urgently design and deliver a strategy to rapidly improve education received by children in custody across England and Wales.

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86. Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 1,732 secondary teachers on 17/01/2025. This is echoed by the DfE's own review of the implementation of the statutory RSHE curriculum in England. It concludes: 'staff felt positively about CPD on offer, however, there is still a sizable minority who are not receiving timely CPD. More can be done to improve the availability and accessibility of RSHE CPD, as many teachers raised issues with timing and accessibility of training.' (DfE, *Relationships, sex and health education Implementation of the 2020 curriculum guidance in school*, 2024: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6745a992b58081a2d9be96a9/Relationships_sex_and_health_education_research_report_2.pdf)
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92. YEF, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability: How Do Boys and Girls Experience Violence?*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/childreenviolence-and-vulnerability-2024/boys-girls-experiences/>)
93. RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025. The review emphasises that schools need more training on violence reduction, including relationship violence reduction. The DfE in England also recently found that teachers want more externally delivered training on challenging RSHE topics (DfE, *Relationships, sex and health education Implementation of the 2020 curriculum guidance in school*, 2024: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6745a992b58081a2d9be96a9/Relationships_sex_and_health_education_research_report_2.pdf); also supported by the Sex Education Forum's polling of children: a majority of those surveyed (57%) say that providing teachers with better training is the most important action towards improving RSE, the most popular choice from a range of options: Sex Education Forum, *Young People's RSE Poll*, 2024, <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/Young%20Peoples%20RSE%20Poll%202024%20-%20Report.pdf>.
94. This assumes that one session would cost c£150 (an assumption following conversations with external deliverers). So 5 sessions would cost £750. Even schools as large as 8 form entry could afford to commission these external sessions (at a cost of £6000), and have funding left to train one VAWG lead and £800 for provider travel expenses. For larger schools, they may need to supplement the grant with other funding. The cost of these sessions, and whether these assumptions hold, should be explored in a pilot.
95. Assumed costs include c.£400k for grants, c.£350k for setup (procuring training providers, mapping external relationship violence reduction session providers and managing delivery and evaluation) and c.£250,000 for a pilot evaluation.
96. Assumed costs include £8k per setting. There are 212 settings in Wales (14 further education colleges, 176 secondary schools and 22 PRUs), and in England, 3,452 secondary schools, 219 colleges. We don't know how many Independent AP or unregistered AP settings there are in England; we know there are 335 state-funded AP settings, but these only make up a third of placements. So instead, we provide a costing for a specific number of AP settings: 500. In England, this would leave £1.6m per year for DfE operation and management of the grant; in Wales, this would leave £300,000.
97. DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf); Welsh Government, *Keeping Learners Safe*, 2022 (<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-04/220401-keeping-learners-safe.pdf>)
98. For instance, KCSIE in England explains: 'All staff should be aware of the indicators, which may signal children are at risk from, or are involved with, serious violent crime.' (p.17); 'Professionals should also be aware that violence can often peak in the hours just before or just after school' (p.160); KCSIE also directs schools to the YEF for 'the evidence for what works in preventing young people from becoming involved in violence' (p.160; p.167), DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf). In addition, Working Together to Safeguard Children also emphasises the role that multi-agency partners play in protecting children from involvement in violence (setting out the Serious Violence Duty across England and Wales, and the expectation that education settings are consulted on this). (HM Government, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cb4349a7ded000c79e4e1/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_statutory_guidance.pdf)).

99. DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/.Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf)
100. Welsh Government, *Keeping Learners Safe*, 2022 (<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-04/220401-.keeping-learnerssafe.pdf>)
101. Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 7,331 teachers on 03/12/2024
102. DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/.Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf)
103. Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 7,298 teachers on 03/12/2024
104. CfEY and MMU, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales*, 2025
105. CfEY and MMU, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales*, 2025
106. RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025
107. DfE, *National Professional Qualifications Framework Review* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/national-professional-qualificationsframework-review>)
108. YEF, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/who-isaffected/>)
109. YEF, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability: How Do Boys and Girls Experience Violence?*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/childreenviolence-and-vulnerability-2024/boys-girls-experiences/>)
110. YEF, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/who-isaffected/>)
111. DfE, Education, *Children's Social Care and Offending: Multi-level Modelling*, 2023 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171532/Education_childrens_social_care_and_offending_multi-level_modelling.pdf); Ullman et al., *Constructs Associated with Youth Crime and Violence Amongst 6-18 Year Olds: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews*, 2024 (<https://research.edgehill.ac.uk/en/publications/constructs-associated-with-youth-crime-andviolence-amongst-6-18y>)
112. Rollings et al., *Association Between School Absence and Exclusion, and Violent Crime*, 2025 (in press); DfE, Education, *Children's Social Care and Offending: Multi-level Modelling*, 2023 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171532/Education_childrens_social_care_and_offending_multi-level_modelling.pdf); DfE and MoJ, *Education, children's social care and offending Descriptive Statistics*, 2022 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6227a9b58fa8f526dcf89e17/Education_children_s_social_care_and_offending_descriptive_stats_FINAL.pdf)
113. YEF, *8 Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_8.KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf)
114. YEF, Education, *Children and Violence: Guidance for School, College and Alternative Provision Leaders to Help Prevent Children's Involvement in Violence*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-guidance/>)
115. YEF, *8 Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_8.KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf)
116. YEF, *8 Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_8.KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf)
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118. YEF, Education, *Children and Violence: Guidance for School, College and Alternative Provision Leaders to Help Prevent Children's Involvement in Violence*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-guidance/>)
119. CfEY and MMU, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales*, 2025
120. In 2021, Ofsted published a review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges in England. Ofsted found that sexual harassment occurred so frequently that it had become 'commonplace'. See Ofsted, *Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges*, 2021 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-andcolleges>); in 2021, Estyn also published a report showing similar findings in Wales. See 'We Don't Tell Our Teachers': *Experiences of Peer-on-Peer Sexual Harassment Among Secondary School Pupils in Wales*, 2021 (https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-12/Experiences%20of%20peer-on-peer%20sexual%20harassment%20among%20secondary%20school%20pupils%20in%20Wales_0.pdf) see also YEF, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability: How Do Boys and Girls Experience Violence?*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/childreenviolence-and-vulnerability-2024/boys-girls-experiences/>).
121. YEF, *Relationship Violence Prevention Lessons and Activities* (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/dating-and-relationship-violenceprevention/>)
122. YEF, *Relationship Violence Prevention Lessons and Activities* (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/dating-and-relationship-violenceprevention/>)
123. YEF, *Bystander Interventions to Prevent Sexual Assault* (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/bystander-interventions-to-prevent-sexualassault/>)
124. Hwb, *Career-long Professional Learning* (<https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-learning/career-long-professional-learning/>)
125. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-national-professional-qualifications-npq>
126. Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 2,207 teachers on 03/12/2024
127. Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 2,207 teachers on 03/12/2024
128. The assumed cost per each teacher completing the NPQ is c.£1.6k, which is similar to the cost of the SENCO NPQ (<https://www.ambition.org.uk/programmes/npqsenco/>). There are 14 further education colleges, 176 secondary schools, and 22 PRUs in Wales. Target settings (20% of secondary schools and colleges) and all PRUs equals 60 settings. In England, there are 3,452 secondary schools and 219 colleges. 20% of these is 734. We don't know how many Independent AP or unregistered AP settings there are.

We know there are 335 state-funded AP settings, but these only make up a third of placements. So instead, we provide a costing for a specific number of AP settings: 500. This makes a total number of target settings in England 1,234.

129. Rollings et al., *Association Between School Absence and Exclusion, and Violent Crime*, 2025 (in press)
130. A. DfE, *Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Multi-level Modelling*, 2023 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171532/Education_childrens_social_care_and_offending_multi-level_modelling.pdf): There are 7 different regression models in the analysis on the relationship between persistent absence for unauthorised other reasons (PAUO) reasons and serious youth violence. Six out of these seven models show a significant positive relationship between PAUO and violence. Children with PAUO status are 1.2 to 2 times more likely to commit a serious youth offence, after accounting for a range of factors. The magnitude of the effect increases when considering a shorter time frame (1.5–2 times as likely within two years). B. Ullman et al., *Constructs Associated with Youth Crime and Violence Amongst 6–18 Year Olds: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews*, 2024 (<https://research.edgehill.ac.uk/en/publications/constructs-associated-with-youth-crime-and-violence-amongst-6-18y>) C. We know that a number of school-based interventions can reduce violence (e.g. mentoring, sports, social skills training and relationship violence reduction); see YEF, *YEF Toolkit* (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/>)
131. YEF, *Education, Children and Violence: Guidance for School, College and Alternative Provision Leaders to Help Prevent Children's Involvement in Violence*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-guidance/>)
132. DfE, *Pupil Absence in Schools in England*, 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2023-24-autumn-and-spring-term>)
133. Welsh Government, *Attendance of Pupils in Maintained Schools: 2 September 2024 to 14 February 2025*, 2025 (<https://www.gov.wales/attendancepupils-maintained-schools-2-september-2024-14-february-2025-html#165737>)
134. DfE, *Pupil Absence in Schools in England: Autumn and Spring Term 2023/24*, 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/findstatistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england>)
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137. CfEY and MMU, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales*, 2025
138. EEF, *Attendance Interventions: Rapid Evidence Assessment*, 2022 (<https://d2tic4wv0iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/pages/Attendance-REA-report.pdf?v=1705993938>)
139. EEF, *BITUP: Updating Parents on Number of School Days Missed - Trial*, 2025 (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/bitup-updating-parents-on-number-of-school-days-missed-2022-23-trial>)
140. EEF, *Understanding the Use of Attendance & Family Liaison Officers as a School-level Strategy to Improve Attendance - School Choices* (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/understanding-the-use-of-attendance-family-liaison-officers-as-a-school-level-strategy-to-improve-attendance>)
141. Taylor et al., *Grassroots Development Phase and Pilot Study Report, YEF and EEF*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2024/07/YEF-and-EEF-Grassroots-Pilot-July-2024-1.pdf>)
142. DfE, *Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Multi-level Modelling*, 2023 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171532/Education_childrens_social_care_and_offending_multi-level_modelling.pdf); DfE and MoJ, *Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Descriptive Statistics*, 2022 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6227a9b58fa8f526dcf89e17/Education_children_s_social_care_and_offending_descriptive_stats_FINAL.pdf)
143. DfE and MoJ, *Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Descriptive Statistics*, 2022 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6227a9b58fa8f526dcf89e17/Education_children_s_social_care_and_offending_descriptive_stats_FINAL.pdf)
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145. Estyn, *Pupil Referral Units*, 2024 (<https://annual-report.estyn.gov.wales/app/uploads/2025/02/pupil-referral-units-2025-02-11.pdf>)
146. EEF, *Attendance Interventions: Rapid Evidence Assessment*, 2022 (<https://d2tic4wv0iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/pages/Attendance-REA-report.pdf?v=1705993938>)
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156. MoJ, *The Government Response to Charlie Taylor's Review of the Youth Justice System*, 2016: The government committed to closing YOIs and opening secure schools (p.30 [here](#) states that the government agrees with Charlie Taylor's vision).



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