

YEF Education Systems Guidance: Evidence to Decision Framework

This Evidence to Decision framework explains the decisions that underpin the recommendations in the Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF's) *Education Policy, Children and Violence: Eight recommendations for education policymakers to prevent children's involvement in violence in England and Wales*. For each recommendation, we answer the following questions:

- a. What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation?**
- b. Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?**
- c. Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?**

As the framework explains, this guidance report draws upon the best available international evidence on how to prevent children's involvement in violence. This includes the YEF Toolkit. The YEF Toolkit uses rigorous, independent and systematic methods, drawing from 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 alternative provision-based (AP-based) strategies. The guidance also uses primary research the YEF has conducted, including the evaluation of violence prevention programmes and large-scale surveys of 10,000 teenage children and 9,500 teachers. The YEF has also commissioned three reviews of practice and policy to inform the specific recommendations in this report.¹

A consultative group of school, college and AP leaders, academics and policy experts have also steered the guidance, using their knowledge of practice and policy to ensure our recommendations are feasible. They are acknowledged at the start of the guidance report. Academic experts have also suggested additional rigorous and relevant studies to inform the guidance.

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.

If you have any questions about this document and the evidence underpinning the guidance, please contact the YEF's Head of Guidance and Reporting, Joe Collin (joe.collin@youthendowmentfund.org.uk).

Please note, this document is not the guidance report; the guidance report can be found here:
<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-policy-children-and-violence/>

¹ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025; Centre for Education and Youth (CFEY) and Manchester Metropolitan University, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales*, 2025; CFEY and University of Oxford, *Education, Violence and the SEND system in England and Wales: A Policy and Practice Review*, 2025.

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| 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. |
| What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation? | <p>Education settings currently lack sufficient knowledge on how to reduce children’s involvement in violence.</p> <p>YEF-commissioned Teacher Tapp surveys of almost 10,000 teachers in England show that 70% of teachers are ‘not confident’ or ‘not at all confident’ in identifying and delivering evidence-based interventions for preventing children’s involvement in violence.² More specifically, a majority of the surveyed teachers identified 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.³ Meanwhile, only 40% of the surveyed teachers think cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based strategy for violence reduction despite this intervention being supported by evidence.^{4,5} This knowledge gap is leading to wasted resources. For instance, 47% of 4,777 surveyed secondary teachers in England report that their school is delivering knife crime awareness assemblies or lessons.⁶</p> <p>This knowledge gap was also identified in two of our funded reviews of practice: RAND Europe’s <i>Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales</i> (2025) and the Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) and Manchester Metropolitan University’s (MMU) <i>Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales</i> (2025). These reviews have interviewed a combined total of 93 education practitioners or experts over the last year. As the RAND Europe review explains, interviewees noted ‘a lack of awareness in schools about evidence of what works’ and that ‘Schools may not always understand which approaches to spend their limited funds on (which may lead to some using approaches that have been found to be ineffective or counterproductive)’.⁷</p> <p>This evidence provides a clear need for equipping teachers with knowledge on evidence-based violence reduction; incorporating it into PP and PDG guidance could improve such knowledge.</p> <p>Violence and the fear of violence can negatively impact educational outcomes.</p> <p>In 2024, 10% of 10,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales reported skipping school due to a fear of violence, with the figure increasing to 26% for children who had been victims of violence.⁸ While schools remain safe places for most children, they are also where violence most commonly happens. Thirty-seven per cent of children who have experienced violence in the past year say it happened in school and during the school day. This is equivalent to 8% of all 13–17-year-olds. The next most likely location for violence (30% of victims) was outside school, either before or after the school day.⁹ Over a fifth (22%) of children across England and Wales also report that the fear of violence has taken a</p> |

² Teacher Tapp survey answered by 9,886 teachers on 17 January 2025.

³ Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), *YEF Toolkit*, n.d. (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/>). The YEF is conducting randomised controlled trials (RCTs) on trauma-informed practice in schools and on police presence in classrooms, with results expected in 2026 and 2027.

⁴ These survey results come from two questions asked by Teacher Tapp on 17 January 2025; one question was directed to 4,777 teachers and the other to 5,004 teachers.

⁵ YEF, ‘Cognitive Behavioural Therapy’, *YEF Toolkit*, n.d. (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/cognitive-behavioural-therapy/>).

⁶ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 4,653 secondary teachers on 19 December 2024.

⁷ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

⁸ YEF, Who Is Affected by Violence?, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/who-is-affected/>).

⁹ YEF, Who Is Affected by Violence? *Violence and Vulnerability 2024*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/who-is-affected/>).

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| | <p>toll on their mental health, disrupting their sleep, suppressing their appetite and making it harder to focus in school.¹⁰ The prevalence of this violence and the impact of the fear of violence on children are likely affecting academic attainment. Skipping school, struggling to focus, experiencing sleep disruptions and facing distraction and turmoil as a result of violence in school could all have a knock-on effect on children’s academic performance.</p> <p>Given that the primary purpose of PP in England and the PDG in Wales is to improve the attainment of disadvantaged children, the likely impact that this violence could have on attainment supports the use of this funding to be targeted at evidence-based violence reduction activities where education settings deem their use to be a priority.</p> <p>In addition, there is a wealth of evidence that we can draw from that identifies evidence-based interventions that reduce children’s involvement in violence and that could be included in PP and PDG guidance. This is presented in in-depth detail in the YEF’s education practice guidance¹¹ and draws heavily from the YEF Toolkit.¹²</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>We believe this recommendation to be feasible, as it only represents a small tweak to the current policy and to PP and PDG guidance. PP and PDG guidance already give education leaders considerable flexibility regarding 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 their attendance; and providing them with extracurricular activities (e.g. sports).¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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 to regulate their behaviour and emotions).¹⁵</p> <p>RAND Europe’s <i>Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales</i> (2025) has suggested that establishing a new pastoral premium for schools, colleges and AP, which they could spend on violence reduction interventions, would be preferable.¹⁶ However, we have considered this at length, consulted extensively with our expert panel, and believe that, in the current fiscal context, the UK government is very unlikely to establish a new funding pot for schools. There are also several challenges to establishing the eligibility criteria for a new fund; these are in addition to the further administrative burden it may place on education settings. Consequently, a tweak to an existing, well-established and well-understood funding mechanism is a more achievable and feasible recommendation that is still ambitious (and which would open up £3bn of funding that could be spent on evidence-based violence reduction, where schools deem this to be a priority).</p> |

¹⁰ YEF, *Who Is Affected by Violence? Violence and Vulnerability 2024*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/who-is-affected/>).

¹¹ 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/>).

¹² YEF, *YEF Toolkit*, n.d. (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/>).

¹³ Department for Education (DfE), *Using Pupil Premium: Guidance for School Leaders*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cf69384239310011b7b91f/Using_Pupil_Premium_-_Guidance_for_School_Leaders.pdf).

¹⁴ Welsh Government, *Guide to the Pupil Development Grant*, 2023 (<https://www.gov.wales/guide-pupil-development-grant-html>).

¹⁵ DfE, *Example Pupil Premium Strategy Statement (Secondary)*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66fabf08e84ae1fd8592eb8b/Example_pupil_premium_strategy_statement_-_secondary.docx).

¹⁶ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

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| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>This is not the most targeted of our recommendations. Rather, it prioritises making best use of an additional funding mechanism to unlock funding for education settings across England and Wales that can be spent on violence reduction where the settings deem this necessary. However, the eligibility criteria of these two funding pots do support some targeting. PP in England and the PDG in Wales are provided to schools according to the number of children they have who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the last six years b. Looked after in care. <p>PP is also provided to children who have a parent working in the armed forces.</p> <p>Children eligible for FSM are more likely to be cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence compared to children who are not eligible.¹⁷ However, we should not overstate how much of a risk factor FSM eligibility is; there are other factors associated with a considerably higher risk (such as being suspended, having previously been arrested or being male).¹⁸ We do know that children in care are at significantly higher risk of later involvement in violence, so this element of the eligibility criteria does support this recommendation to target funding to the children vulnerable to involvement in violence.¹⁹</p> <p>With regard to race equity, children from particular Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds (particularly Traveller of Irish Heritage, Gypsy/Roma, White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, Black African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnicity) have higher FSM eligibility rates than White British pupils. Conversely, children of Indian and Chinese ethnicity have lower eligibility rates. Therefore, directing funding via PP will, in practice, often direct funding to schools with higher numbers of children from particular ethnic minority communities.²⁰</p> |
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| <p>Recommendation 2</p> | <p>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)</p> |
| <p>What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation?</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>This is a key finding of the YEF-commissioned RAND Europe review of education policy and practice. Based on a literature review, interviews with 50 education practitioners and policy experts, and a subsequent Delphi policy development exercise, the review concludes that ‘Funding for schools is not adequate to support consistent, effective practice to prevent children’s involvement in violence’.²¹</p> |

¹⁷ Maria Fuller and Jenny McNally, *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).

¹⁸ Maria Fuller and Jenny McNally, *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).

¹⁹ Maria Fuller and Jenny McNally, *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).

²⁰ DfE, *Academic Year 2023/24: Schools, Pupils and Their Characteristics*, 6 June 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2023-24>).

²¹ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

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| | <p>Indeed, we know that schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings across England and Wales are under considerable budgetary pressure, particularly in terms of supporting vulnerable children.²² In England, 76% of school senior leaders report not having enough funding to support disadvantaged children.²³ 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.²⁴ 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;²⁵ the prevalence of probable mental health disorders increased from one in eight children in 2017 to one in six in 2022;²⁶ and COVID-19 has had a lasting impact on children’s attendance rates (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.²⁷ External support to schools, such as mental health services, has been unable to keep pace with this demand,²⁸ while significant reductions, in real terms, of funding for local authorities have reduced the support available from other partners, such as the youth sector.²⁹ In this context, education settings are struggling to meet the needs of their most vulnerable children.³⁰</p> <p>Violence is concentrated in specific areas, so funding should be targeted at high-violence areas.</p> <p>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 the city’s geographic areas. This pattern is backed up by a recent review of international research that found that, on average, 50% of crime happens in just 4.5% of streets.³¹ Therefore, where funding is limited, it is imperative to focus resources on areas with high levels of violence.</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>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: by extending SAFE Taskforces or establishing a new TARGET fund.</p> |

²² RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025. ‘Analysis by IFS shows that schools in England and Wales have experienced cuts to capital funding and real-time cuts to per pupil spending between 2010 and 2023 (IFS, 2024a; 2024b). Despite expected real-term increases in school spending from 2023 onwards, analysis of data by NFER have shown that English schools still faced considerable cost pressures and have made cuts in response in 2022/23 (NFER, 2024). While figures on academies are not yet published, DfE data suggests that over 10% of local authority schools in England in 2022/23 operated at a budget deficit (DfE, 2024q).’

²³ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 2,669 teachers on 15 January 2025.

²⁴ Cymru NAHT, *Falling Short: The Deepening School Funding Crisis in Wales*, 2024 (https://www.naht.org.uk/Portals/0/PDFs/Wales/NAHT%20Wales%20funding%20report_single-page-view.pdf?ver=2024-09-20-082120-060).

²⁵ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025. ‘Analysis of government statistics on UK households below the average income suggests that the number of children living in relative poverty (after housing costs) in the UK grew steadily from 3.6m in 2011/12, to a record high of 4.4m in 2022/23, equating to a rise of 20.6% over that period (IfG, 2024a).’

²⁶ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025. ‘Official statistics from the NHS, based on survey data, suggest that between 2017 and 2022, rates of probable mental disorder [such as depression or anxiety] increased from around 1 in 8 young people aged 7–16 to more than 1 in 6 (NHS, 2022).’

²⁷ House of Commons Library, *Children and Young People’s Mental Health: Policy and Services (England)*, Research Briefing, 2024 (<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7196/CBP-7196.pdf>).

²⁸ House of Commons Library, *Children and Young People’s Mental Health: Policy and Services (England)*, Research Briefing, 2024 (<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7196/CBP-7196.pdf>).

²⁹ Department for Media, Culture and Sport, *Youth Provision and Life Outcomes: A Study of the Local Impact of Youth Clubs*, 2024 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-provision-and-life-outcomes-research/youth-provision-and-life-outcomes-a-study-of-the-local-impact-of-youth-clubs-executive-summary>). The study reports that since 2011, local authority funding of youth provision declined in real terms from £1,058m to £409m in 2021, a reduction of over 60%.

³⁰ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

³¹ YEF, *Eight Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf).

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| | <p>Our ideal mechanism would be to deliver via SAFE Taskforces (and pilot these in Wales), as these are already being delivered in 10 local authority areas in England. However, we do not yet have evidence of impact and await the results of the YEF-funded quasi-experimental design evaluation (reporting in summer 2026). This evaluation measures the impact of SAFE on a range of outcomes, including suspensions, absence and violence. Should the results fail to show a positive impact of SAFE on these outcomes, we will still require a mechanism to direct funding to education settings to spend on violence reduction activities in high-violence areas. The TARGET fund offers a mechanism to do this. However, we would require piloting and subsequent causal evaluation of this fund to establish its impact.</p> <p>The £100m assumed cost of this recommendation, assumes that the DfE has spent c.£30m, over three years, to deliver SAFE to 11-14 year olds. A 5-year expansion to the same number of children would cost c.£50m; we then propose doubling the number of eligible children to include 15-18 year olds, leading us to a £100m cost. The TARGET fund would provide £100,000, annually, to 200 schools, for 5 years (also costing £100m).</p> <p>The guidance also makes a case for the cost of this recommendation being feasible. 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 £1bn by 2029–30.³² The government should view this £1bn as a saving that can be reinvested into education; 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.³³</p> |
| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>Both of our suggested mechanisms of funding would be explicitly targeted at the children most at risk of involvement in violence. Both would be delivered in areas of high violence, and within those areas, we would aim to specify an explicit focus on children who are particularly at risk of involvement in violence. For instance, SAFE is targeted at 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; and/or are starting to disengage from education.³⁴ The guidance also makes the case to extend the SAFE target group 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).³⁵</p> <p>With regard to race, the evaluation of SAFE includes a subgroup analysis on the impact on primary outcomes (suspensions) according to the ethnicity of the children involved. The statistical power of these subgroup analyses will likely be lower than when considering full-sample impact estimates and will thus be considered exploratory. However, we will consider these findings and what they mean for the recommendation upon receiving the evaluation results.</p> |

³² Robbie Cruikshanks, *School Funding Model: Effect of Falling School Rolls*, 2024 (<https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/School-funding-model-Effect-of-falling-rolls-FINAL-EMBARGO.pdf>).

³³ GOV.Wales, *Schools' Census Results: January 2024*, 31 July 2024, (<https://www.gov.wales/schools-census-results-january-2024.html>).

³⁴ RAND Europe, University of Westminster, FFT Education Datalab, *Evaluation of the 'SAFE' (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) Taskforces*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SAFE-Evaluation-Study-Protocol-October-2024.pdf>).

³⁵ YEF, *Eight Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf).

| Recommendation 3 | Amend Ofsted's proposed inspection toolkits to assess how settings support suspended children and safeguard children from violence. |
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| <p>What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation?</p> | <p>Suspension and exclusion are key risk factors for later involvement in violence.</p> <p>Being suspended or excluded places children at greater risk of later involvement in violence. As Rollings et al. (in press) show, even after controlling for behavioural difficulties, children suspended or excluded in Years 10 and 11 are 2.36 times more likely to report violent behaviour at age 17 or 18. They are also 4.68 times more likely to have a police record for any offence. This full analysis will be published in late May 2025.³⁶ There is also further evidence in support of this association from the DfE's multi-level data modelling. After controlling for a range of other factors, children who receive a suspension in Years 7 to 10 are between four and five times more likely to be cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence. Those permanently excluded during those years are between one and two times as likely, with the risk being highest for those excluded in Year 7. This risk does decline with age, with those excluded in year 11 having a lower chance of later involvement in violence than children not excluded.³⁷ Recent studies also point to a potentially causal link between exclusion and offending. Specifically, Castro et al. analysed the link between exclusion and suspension in Year 10 and the probability of experiencing custody at ages 15–17. They found that 'exclusion presents a small but non-ignorable risk of increases in custody'. The researchers use a particularly novel method in the study, and future evaluation is required to build confidence in this causal link.³⁸ In addition, studies of serious case reviews identify suspension and exclusion as 'trigger points' for risk of serious harm.³⁹</p> <p>Suspension and exclusion rates are rising.</p> <p>The use of suspension and exclusion in England is rising. In 2021–22, suspensions in England reached a record high of 6.9 suspensions per 100 pupils (equating to 578,300 suspensions); in 2022–23, they increased again to 9.3 (786,961 suspensions). These rates compare to a pre-pandemic rate of 5.4 (438,265 suspensions) in 2018–19.⁴⁰ Repeated suspensions for children are also common; in 2021–22, the average secondary-age suspended child was suspended 2.3 times, with c.7,000 children being suspended more than 10 times.⁴¹ In addition, the number of pupils suspended at least once has increased by 28%, from 134,500 in autumn term 2022/23 to 171,800 in autumn term 2023/24. In the latest autumn term, among the pupils who were suspended: 59% were suspended once, 32% were suspended 2 to 4 times, and 9% were suspended 5 or more times within the term.⁴² 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.</p> <p>Schools are not currently providing enough support to suspended children.</p> <p>When children in England are suspended for five days or less, the DfE in England advises that the school designs a reintegration strategy to support the child's return to school and that it holds a reintegration meeting with the child (with parents attending if possible). The DfE also</p> |

³⁶ Jasmine Rollings et al., *An Examination of the Association Between School Absence, Exclusion and Violent Crime*, in press.

³⁷ Maria Fuller and Jenny McNally, *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);

³⁸ Claire Cathro et al., *School Exclusions and Youth Custody*, 2023 (<https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Nuffield-Foundation-Exclusions-and-Youth-Custody-Report-vFinal-2023-01-17.pdf>).

³⁹ Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, *It Was Hard to Escape: Safeguarding Children at Risk from Criminal Exploitation*, 2020

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e5e7f47e90e077e3385cb44/Safeguarding_children_at_risk_from_criminal_exploitation_review.pdf).

⁴⁰ DfE, *Academic Year 2022/23: Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions in England*, last updated 21 November 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england/2022-23>).

⁴¹ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

⁴² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england/2023-24-autumn-term>

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).⁴³ In practice, however, the provision of this support is very limited.

When asked, in February 2025, about the last child they had 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, and 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.⁴⁴

Suspended children also report a lack of support. Of the 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.⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

⁴³ DfE, *Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from Maintained Schools, Academies and Pupil Referral Units in England, Including Pupil Movement: Guidance for Maintained Schools, Academies, and Pupil Referral Units in England, 2024* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66be0d92c32366481ca4918a/Suspensions_and_permanent_exclusions_guidance.pdf).

⁴⁴ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 2,678 headteachers and members of the senior leadership team on 14 February 2025.

⁴⁵ YEF, *Who Is Affected by Violence? Children, Violence and Vulnerability, 2024* (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/>).

⁴⁶ Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), *Alternative Provision in Local Areas in England: A Thematic Review, February 2024* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-in-local-areas-in-england-a-thematic-review/alternative-provision-in-local-areas-in-england-a-thematic-review>). The report contains a survey of 700 parents, children and professionals. It finds that 50% of respondents agree that 'Children in AP and their families get the right support when moving between services or providers in their local area'.

⁴⁷ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 625 headteachers on 20 January 2025

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| | <p>Education settings are uniquely placed to safeguard children from involvement in violence. However, they often fail to see violence as a safeguarding issue.</p> <p>Education is the one service that all children are expected to attend, giving these settings a unique opportunity to understand the children and their families and to influence the 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.⁴⁸ 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 that appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and actively used, engage in their role in multi-agency work, proactively share information and actions and ensure staff undergo appropriate training and create cultures where children feel safe to speak out and share any concerns they have.⁴⁹ Statutory safeguarding guidance also makes explicit reference to education settings’ role in protecting children from involvement in violence (see the detail on feasibility in the next row).</p> <p>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 and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of 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’.⁵⁰ In addition, a recent YEF-funded review by CfEY and MMU 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’ ability to prioritise and address serious violence as a safeguarding concern.⁵¹</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>As we note in the introduction to the guidance, this recommendation refers only to practice in England, not in Wales. This is simply because we are responding to the announcement about Ofsted’s reforms to inspection and the accompanying consultation (which is not occurring with Estyn in Wales). We judged that this consultation was a golden opportunity to impact Ofsted’s approach to inspection, and so, while there are other possible routes to achieving the aims set out in this recommendation, we took the pragmatic decision to focus on the route we can impact now. In 2025, we intend to commission a further study on how to improve the support provided to suspended and excluded children across England and Wales, and we expect that further recommendations for policy change will be derived from this work.</p> |

⁴⁸ DfE, *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive: Breaking Down Barriers to Opportunity*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67375fe5ed0fc07b53499a42/Keeping_Children_Safe_Helping_Families_Thrive_.pdf).

⁴⁹ DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf).

⁵⁰ Ofsted, CQC, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation, *Multi-agency Responses to Serious Youth Violence: Working Together to Support and Protect Children*, 2024 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-responses-to-serious-youth-violence-working-together-to-support-and-protect-children/multi-agency-responses-to-serious-youth-violence-working-together-to-support-and-protect-children>).

⁵¹ CfEY and MMU, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales*, 2025.

The current recommendation only suggests small tweaks to the proposed new Ofsted school inspection toolkits. It is, therefore, completely free and builds on existing government statutory guidance – specifically:

- **DfE suspension and permanent exclusion guidance:** As noted, this guidance already calls on headteachers to ensure that suspended children are set work and are supported by a reintegration strategy. It also encourages them to consider a range of methods to support reintegration (including mentoring, academic support and report cards).⁵²
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) and Working Together to Safeguard Children:** Also, as noted, education settings play a crucial role in protecting children from involvement in violence, and statutory safeguarding guidance (both KCSIE and the guidance on working together to safeguard children) already explains how settings should be protecting children from all types of child-on-child abuse. For instance, KCSIE states that:
 - ‘All staff should be aware of the indicators, which may signal children are at risk from, or are involved with, serious violent crime’ (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’ (pp. 160, 167).⁵³
 - 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 and the expectation that education settings are consulted on this).⁵⁴

The recommendation is also very clear that we are not calling for any limitation in the power of headteachers to suspend or exclude children. As we explain, 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.

The feasibility of this recommendation is also supported by RAND Europe’s *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales* (2025).⁵⁶ Following interviews with 30 education practitioners and 20 education policy and system leaders and a Delphi consultation exercise to discuss and reach consensus on policy suggestions, the review calls for government to ‘ensure upcoming changes by Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) include a focus on inclusivity, equity and good practice to reduce violence’; the review explains that this could include changes such as making use of the recently announced annual reviews of safeguarding, off-rolling and attendance to include a consideration of how schools are using suspension. After much deliberation and consultation with the expert panel, we decided to instead focus more specifically on the current consultation on the new inspection approach (given that this has been announced), and we await further information on annual reviews.

⁵² DfE, *School Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions*, 2012 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion>).

⁵³ DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf).

⁵⁴ HM Government, *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: A guide to Multi-agency Working to Help, Protect and Promote the Welfare of Children, 2023* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cb4349a7ded0000c79e4e1/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_statutory_guidance.pdf).

⁵⁵ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 699 headteachers on 19 December 2024.

⁵⁶ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

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| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>As noted in the evidence warrant section, children who are suspended are at greater risk of involvement in violence. Targeting support towards these children is, therefore, sensible.</p> <p>This recommendation also has the potential to further race equity, given the current racial disparities in suspension rates. Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish Traveller heritage, children of White and Black Caribbean ethnicity and children of Black Caribbean ethnicity are most likely to be excluded or suspended.⁵⁷ Ensuring that suspended children receive better support should have a disproportionately positive impact on children from these communities, as they are currently suspended at disproportionate rates. This is also true for children eligible for FSM and children with SEND. The suspension rate in England for pupils eligible for FSM is more than four times that of pupils who are not eligible, while the suspension rate among pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) is 10.05 suspensions per 100 pupils which is lower than the rate for those with special educational needs (SEND) support at 11.27. In contrast, the rate for pupils with no identified SEND is 2.69. The gap in suspension rates between pupils with an EHCP or SEND support and those with no identified SEND has also been widening since the pandemic.⁵⁸</p> |
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| <p>Recommendation 4</p> | <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>What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation?</p> | <p>Children in AP are at greater risk of involvement in violence.</p> <p>There are approximately 74,000 children in AP in England⁵⁹ and 2,600 in EOTAS in Wales.⁶⁰ These children are at significantly greater risk of involvement in violence compared to children in mainstream education settings. Between 2012 and 2015, 14% of Key Stage 4 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).^{61,62}</p> <p>APST uses co-location to provide evidence-informed support to children who need it most.</p> <p>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):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech and language therapist • Mental health professional |

⁵⁷ DfE, *Academic Year 2022/23: Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions in England*, last updated 21 November 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england/2022-23>).

⁵⁸ DfE, *Academic Year 2022/23: Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions in England*, last updated 21 November 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england/2022-23>).

⁵⁹ There is some uncertainty about the number of children in alternative provision (AP), and estimating prevalence is complex. The IntegratED annual report offers the best available estimate. IntegratED *IntegratED 2024 Annual Report, 2024* (<https://www.integrated.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AnnualReport2024.pdf>).

⁶⁰ GOV.Wales, *Pupils Educated Other Than at School: September 2023 to August 2024 (Revised)*, last updated 12 September 2024 (<https://www.gov.wales/pupils-educated-other-school-september-2023-august-2024-revised-html>).

⁶¹ DfE and Ministry of Justice (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).

⁶² DfE, *Academic Year 2019/20: Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Local Authority Level Dashboard*, 30 March 2023 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-children-s-social-care-and-offending-local-authority-level-dashboard/2019-20>).

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-16 transition coach • Youth worker • Educational psychologist • Family support worker • Youth justice worker • Social worker. <p>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 where they can meet the children enables AP settings to better support the 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 those children at heightened risk.</p> <p>A key caveat to this recommendation is the need to wait for the results of the ongoing evaluation.</p> <p>APST still requires robust evaluation. The 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 2025.⁶³ The DfE should wait for the findings of this evaluation before proceeding. The feasibility of the model has also not yet been tested in Wales. Therefore, we advise that, 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. The Welsh Government may opt to start on a smaller scale, and we would advise liaising with the APST evaluation team and the DfE in England to learn from their experience with APST.</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>APST is already being delivered in 22 AP settings in England, evidencing its feasibility. In addition, there is increasing support for the co-location of services in education settings to better address the needs of children, particularly those with SEND.⁶⁴ Two of the practice and policy reviews commissioned to support and inform this guidance have identified co-location to support vulnerable children as a feasible and desirable policy.⁶⁵</p> <p>More broadly, a majority of mainstream school headteachers in England surveyed through a YEF-funded Teacher Tapp survey 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%).⁶⁶ Evidently, there is support in the sector for targeted, specialist support.</p> |

⁶³ RAND Europe, University of Westminster, FFT Education Datalab, *Evaluation of the 'SAFE' (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) Taskforces*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SAFE-Evaluation-Study-Protocol-October-2024.pdf>).

⁶⁴ CfEY and University of Oxford, *Education, Violence and the SEND System in England and Wales: A Policy and Practice Review*, 2025; RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

⁶⁵ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales* 2025; CfEY and University of Oxford, *Education, Violence and the SEND system in England and Wales: A Policy and Practice Review*, 2025.

⁶⁶ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 611 headteachers on 20 January 2025.

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| | <p>The cost assumes a yearly cost of £6.4m to deliver in 22 settings, derived from discussions with the DfE, (so a 5 year extension in these settings would cost £32m). A 5 setting pilot in Wales would cost £1.45m, and we recommend £1.6m in Wales to also account for a pilot evaluation. However, these costs are only provisional, and will be updated upon the publication of the APST evaluation.</p> |
| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>As noted in the evidence warrant section, children who are in AP are at greater risk of involvement in violence. Targeting support towards these children is, therefore, sensible. When delivering APST, settings may also choose to target support specifically towards the most vulnerable children.</p> <p>Extending APST could also positively impact race equity (as children of Black Caribbean ethnicity and children of Black Caribbean and White ethnicity are currently over-represented in the AP sector) and support children with SEND, boys and children eligible for FSM, who are also over-represented in AP. As explained by the RAND Europe review:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">‘FFT Education Datalab has analysed the characteristics of pupils attending AP in England (FFT, 2024h). In Summer 2022, 71% of pupils attending AP schools with single or main registrations and 59% of subsidiary registered pupils were male. This compares to 51% of pupils in mainstream and special schools. 73% of main registered pupils and 78% of subsidiary registered pupils were White British compared to 64% of pupils in mainstream and special schools. Pupils of a Black Caribbean (3% main registered, 2% subsidiary registered and 1% of pupils in mainstream and special schools) or Mixed White/Black Caribbean ethnicity (4% main registered, 4% subsidiary registered and 3% of pupils in mainstream and special schools) were also over-represented in the AP sector. 82% of single or main registered pupils and 77% of subsidiary registered pupils were recorded as having SEN, compared to 17% of pupils in mainstream and special schools. In the majority of cases, AP pupils were identified as having SEMH [social, emotional, and mental health] needs as their primary type of SEN (55% of main registered, 33% of subsidiary registered and 3% of pupils in mainstream and special schools). 55% of main registered pupils and 46% of subsidiary registered pupils were eligible for FSM compared to 23% of pupils in mainstream and special schools.’⁶⁷</p> |

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| <p>Recommendation 5</p> | <p>Pilot and scale up a violence against women and girls (VAWG) lead training grant programme in secondary schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings.</p> |
| <p>What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation?</p> | <p>Far too many children are experiencing relationship violence.</p> <p>In 2024, the YEF surveyed 10,000 13–17-year-olds from across England and Wales. Seven per cent of girls and 6% of boys reported experiencing sexual violence in the past year. In addition, violence and controlling behaviours within teenage romantic relationships are alarmingly common. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents had been in a romantic relationship over the past year. Among these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly half (49%) have experienced violent or controlling behaviours from their partner. Controlling behaviours are the most common, reported by 46% of those in relationships, and include behaviours such as having their partner check who they’ve been talking |

⁶⁷ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

to on their phone or social media accounts (30%). They also include being afraid to disagree with their partner (27%) or being afraid to break up with them (26%).

- **One in three children in relationships (31%) have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence.** Alarming, 20% of children in relationships report being pressured or forced into sexual activities they did not consent to. Nineteen per cent have experienced physical violence, such as being hit, kicked or shoved. Seventeen per cent have had explicit images or videos shared online by a partner without their consent.
- **Younger teens (aged 13–15) in relationships are significantly more likely to report violent or controlling experiences in their relationships (58%)** than those aged 16–17 (42% of those in relationships).⁶⁸

Relationship violence prevention activities can protect children from involvement in violence.

As the YEF Toolkit explains, 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%). We have a high level of confidence in this estimate because it is based on a high-quality review of 16 studies that measure relationship violence perpetration. We did not give the intervention the highest security rating because there is a lot of variation in the studies in the review: some studies suggested that the impact was higher, and others suggested it was lower. None of these studies were undertaken in England or Wales.⁶⁹ The most impactful type of relationship violence prevention activities is lessons that are delivered to children and which 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 and relationship violence and gender-based violence.⁷⁰

The YEF Toolkit strand is also underpinned by an extensive analysis of the implementation evidence on how to effectively deliver relationship violence reduction activities. Melendez-Torres et al. conducted a review of 137 implementation and process evaluations, and this analysis has closely informed the recommended training grant. For instance:

- We recommend that the appointed VAWG lead should have an interest in and a willingness to undertake this role. A clear finding from the implementation evidence is that facilitators and teachers with good knowledge of dating and relationship violence and who have confidence in the delivery of materials and sessions achieve greater engagement with children and young people. As explained by Melendez-Torres et al.:

'For both school-based facilitators and outside facilitators (n = 5), selecting the most appropriate individuals to facilitate the programme was just as critical as sufficient training of the facilitators after selection. This was particularly apparent for school-

⁶⁸ YEF, How Do Boys and Girls Experience Violence?, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/boys-girls-experiences/>).

⁶⁹ YEF, Relationship Violence Prevention Lessons and Activities, *YEF Toolkit*, n.d. (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/dating-and-relationship-violence-prevention/>).

⁷⁰ YEF, Relationship Violence Prevention Lessons and Activities, *YEF Toolkit*, n.d. (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/dating-and-relationship-violence-prevention/>); Hannah Gaffney et al., *Dating and Relationship Violence Prevention: Toolkit Technical Report*, 2022 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Dating-and-Relationship-Violence-Prevention_Technical-Report.pdf); G. J. Melendez-Torres et al., School-based Interventions to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-based Violence: STOP-DRV-GBV Systematic Review, *Public Health Research* 12(3), 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.3310/KTWR6997>).

based facilitators who ranged greatly in their initial confidence and competence in delivering DRV/GBV [dating and relationship violence or gender-based violence] prevention materials.⁷¹

- We recommend that schools either use internal staff or buy in external expertise to support delivery. This allows schools to adapt the grant to suit their needs and current level of expertise. The implementation evidence reveals that providing additional external support can, indeed, provide useful additional expertise, while retaining some element of in-school delivery (as the training grant does) is more likely to ensure the sustainability of the delivery. As explained by Melendez-Torres et al.:

‘Sixty-seven studies discussed implementation factors operating at the level of the facilitator, including facilitator content knowledge (n = 30, 34), support from the ‘other side’ (n = 29), and sustainability and school-based facilitators (n = 3). School-based facilitators were found to have a much wider variation in content knowledge, while outside facilitators were found to have a more consistent knowledge level. Furthermore, having support from an outside violence prevention organisation as a school-based facilitator was found to aid implementation, while having support from a school contact as an outside facilitator was found to likewise aid implementation. Lastly, using school-based facilitators was identified as a way to increase the sustainability of interventions through embedding it into the school curriculum.’

- We advise delivering at least five sessions to Year 9 children. There is no set ideal number that we can derive from the evidence on how many sessions should be delivered and to what age group. However, we have been overly specific here in order to ensure a minimum level of delivery occurs. This is important, as time constraints often lead to relationship violence reduction activities being squeezed out. As explained by Melendez-Torres et al.:

‘Fifty-four studies discussed barriers relating to school-level time constraints, which were shown to lead to curriculum modifications, impacting intervention dosage and fidelity. Limited space in the curriculum restricted the class time that was available for DRV/GBV [dating and relationship violence or gender-based violence] interventions (n = 22, 23). The time instead was prioritised for academic performance in many cases (n = 16).⁷²

Similarly, our Teacher Tapp survey, which surveyed 9,753 teachers on 20 January 2025, revealed that 46% of teachers identified ‘time on the curriculum’ as a main barrier to delivering effective personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSHE) classes in school.⁷³

⁷¹ G. J. Melendez-Torres et al., School-based Interventions to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-based Violence: STOP-DRV-GBV Systematic Review, *Public Health Research* 12(3), 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.3310/KTWR6997>).

⁷² G. J. Melendez-Torres et al., School-based Interventions to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-based Violence: STOP-DRV-GBV Systematic Review, *Public Health Research* 12(3), 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.3310/KTWR6997>).

⁷³ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 9,753 teachers on 20 January 2025.

- The implementation analysis also reveals that a lack of resources to deliver activities can prevent relationship violence prevention activities from being implemented.⁷⁴ This adds further weight to the call to provide specific funding via a VAWG lead training grant.

The recommendation also suggests that the grant includes a training programme for VAWG leads; this training should consult Melendez-Torres et al., including the article’s implementation analysis, to ensure that all useful implementation insights (such as the importance of good student–facilitator relationships and of ensuring that session content fits the context of the children and the school)⁷⁵ are shared with VAWG leads.

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

Despite the importance of dating and relationship violence prevention activities, too many children report that they are currently missing out on them. As our survey of 10,000 children shows, 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 a healthy and respectful romantic relationship. 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).⁷⁶ More broadly, our Teacher Tapp survey reveals that less than half (48%) of secondary school teachers in England who were surveyed in December 2024 reported that their school is delivering teacher-led lessons on reducing relationship violence.⁷⁷

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

Relationship violence prevention lessons are most commonly taught through PSHE/RSHE. Admittedly, improvements have been made in the teaching of these subjects in England, particularly since RSHE was made statutory in secondary schools in England in 2020. IFF Research conducted an independent DfE-commissioned evaluation of statutory RSHE guidance implementation and found that 97% of those surveyed covered statutory RSHE through 'timetabled RSHE lessons, including lessons as part of timetabled PSHE education' and that 'the guidance was broadly being used in schools, mostly successfully'.⁷⁸ In addition, a 2024 polling of students by Censuswide, commissioned by the Sex Education Forum, also suggests that there has been improvement in the RSHE children now receive. Fifty per cent of respondents rated the quality of their school RSHE as 'good' or 'very good', up 10 per cent from the 40% who said as much when asked the same question in a 2022 poll.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ G. J. Melendez-Torres et al., School-based Interventions to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-based Violence: STOP-DRV-GBV Systematic Review, *Public Health Research* 12(3), 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.3310/KTWR6997>).

⁷⁵ G. J. Melendez-Torres et al., School-based Interventions to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-based Violence: STOP-DRV-GBV Systematic Review, *Public Health Research* 12(3), 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.3310/KTWR6997>).

⁷⁶ YEF, How Do Boys and Girls Experience Violence?, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability* 2024, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/boys-girls-experiences/>).

⁷⁷ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 4,653 secondary teachers on 19 December 2024.

⁷⁸ 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).

⁷⁹ Sex Education Forum, *Young People’s RSE Poll 2024*, 2024 (<https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/Young%20Peoples%20RSE%20Poll%202024%20-%20Report.pdf>).

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| | <p>However, significant gaps in teacher confidence and expertise persist. In a January 2025 Teacher Tapp 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.⁸⁰ And among the teachers who teach these subjects, there are clear confidence gaps. Of the secondary teachers who reported teaching RSHE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 were to witness a sexual assault.⁸¹ <p>These confidence gaps are unsurprising, given that almost a third (31%) of secondary teachers in England 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).⁸² And these confidence gaps were also identified in the DfE’s own commissioned independent evaluation of statutory RSHE in England. The evaluation reports, ‘[T]here is still a sizable minority who are not receiving timely CPD [continuing professional development]. More can be done to improve the availability and accessibility of RSHE CPD.’ It also states, ‘[M]ore 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.’⁸³</p> <p>Gaps were also identified in RAND Europe’s (YEF-commissioned) <i>Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales</i>. Interviewees described RSHE as highly inconsistent in both content and quality, and key challenges in the effective delivery of the RSHE curriculum included schools feeling the need to prioritise other aspects of the curriculum, a lack of high-quality teaching materials to support effective learning and a limited supply of a skilled workforce to deliver this work.⁸⁴</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>It is imperative to test the feasibility of the VAWG lead training grant.</p> <p>We do not yet know if the VAWG lead training grant is feasible to deliver in schools in England and Wales. As a result, the recommendation advises that a pilot of the programme should first be conducted in 50 settings (at a cost of £1m) to establish feasibility and hone delivery. We are heartened by the clear precedent in England of 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.⁸⁵ However, we still require robust evaluation of any VAWG lead training grant delivery to establish whether it is feasible and whether it effectively reduces violence.</p> <p>The UK evidence base on similar interventions is very limited; the most relevant study is a small-scale pilot, Project Respect (Meiskin et al., 2020). This was implemented in four schools during the 2017–18 academic year as a whole-school multi-component intervention to reduce dating and relationship violence. Specifically:</p> |

⁸⁰ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 6,338 secondary teachers on 20 January 2025.

⁸¹ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 1,712 secondary teachers on 17 January 2025.

⁸² Teacher Tapp survey answered by 1,732 secondary teachers on 17 January 2025.

⁸³ 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).

⁸⁴ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

⁸⁵ DfE, *Senior Mental Health Lead Training: Conditions of Grant for the 2024 to 2025 Financial Year*, 2024 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/senior-mental-health-lead-training-grant-funding/senior-mental-health-lead-training-conditions-of-grant-for-the-2024-to-2025-financial-year>).

- School leadership teams received training provided by an NSPCC trainer. These trained school leaders then trained other school staff on how to respond effectively to dating and relationship violence and gender-based harassment among their students.
- The school leadership teams were also asked to review school policies and procedures, ensure that these included content to prevent dating and relationship violence, and identify 'hotspots' in the school where dating and relationship violence occurred more frequently (to target support there).
- The programme also included a classroom curriculum with age-appropriate lessons for those in Years 9 and 10.⁸⁶

The pilot did not progress to further evaluation in a larger scale randomised controlled trial, as the evaluators concluded that intervention acceptability and feasibility were mixed. However, they did not state that this should preclude further pilots of interventions designed to address VAWG. As the evaluators noted, 'High prevalence of dating and relationship violence highlights the ongoing need for effective intervention. Potential intervention refinements would include more external support for schools and enhanced curriculum materials.' Any pilot should aim to learn from the findings of Project Respect while also recognising that it only represents a single small-scale study.⁸⁷

A pilot should also learn from the ongoing Think Again study, a collaboration between the Sex Education Forum, the University of Exeter, and the Ending Youth Violence Lab. This evaluation is delivering a feasibility study in four schools in England of an intervention that combines an assessment of school capacity and needs with student-staff action groups and a curriculum of five to nine lessons on reducing dating violence and gender-based violence. The feasibility study will report in 2025.

Aligning with a core government priority.

While we recognise the limited UK evidence base for the training grant, we are determined to meet the urgency of the challenge with an ambitious recommendation that is based on sound international evidence and can make a substantial contribution to the UK evidence base. This urgency is further underlined by the UK government's stated mission to halve violence against women and girls in the next 10 years.⁸⁸ This is a key reason why we have used the term 'VAWG' in this recommendation and have refrained from calling for a more general improvement in RSHE/PSHE provision.

Indeed, one approach to this recommendation might have been to call for funding to improve the delivery of RSHE and PSHE more generally. This could have been achieved via investment in more general training (either in initial teacher training or continuing professional development) on PSHE and RSHE. The recommendation could also have called for the curriculum across England and Wales to reassert the importance of PSHE and RSHE (as recommended by RAND).⁸⁹ However, we contend that focusing more explicitly on VAWG and on reducing dating and relationship violence may be more likely to receive government funding, as it so closely aligns with a stated government mission, particularly in the current tight fiscal context.

⁸⁶ Hannah Gaffney et al., *Dating and Relationship Violence Prevention: Toolkit Technical Report*, 2022 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Dating-and-Relationship-Violence-Prevention-Technical-Report.pdf>).

⁸⁷ Rebecca Meiksin et al., *A School Intervention for 13- To 15-year-olds to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence: The Project Respect Pilot Cluster RCT*, *Public Health Research* 8(5), 2020 (<https://doi.org/10.3310/phr08050>).

⁸⁸ Home Office and Jess Phillips, *Government Pledges to Protect More Women from Violence*, 2025 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-to-protect-more-women-from-violence>).

⁸⁹ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

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| | <p>Proposed costs.</p> <p>We have carefully considered the costs, and we judge that £8,000 is likely to be sufficient to support most schools to deliver the grant. This assumes that settings can either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend £1,200 to train one VAWG lead (matching the cost of senior mental health lead training), leaving £6,800 to buy in externally delivered relationship violence reduction sessions. Assuming one relationship violence reduction session for Year 9 children would cost £150 (an assumption we have derived following conversations with external deliverers); five sessions would cost £750. Even schools as large as eight-form entry could afford to commission these external sessions (at a cost of £6,000) and have funding left (circa £800) for provider travel expenses. Larger schools may need to supplement the grant with other funding. • Spend £7,200 to train a team of six in-school VAWG leads who could deliver all the requirements of the grant (including the sessions offered to children). This would leave £800 for additional resources to support teaching. <p>The cost of these sessions and whether these assumptions hold should be explored in a pilot. The total cost of the pilot is assumed to be £1m; this would provide £400k for grants, £350k for setup (procuring training providers, mapping external relationship violence reduction session providers and managing delivery and evaluation) and £250k for a pilot evaluation. Should this be successful, a full-scale up to all secondary and college settings in England (alongside 500 secondary AP settings) and all secondaries and PRUs in Wales would cost circa £35m in England and £2m in Wales. This assumes that there are 212 settings in Wales (14 further education colleges, 176 secondary schools and 22 PRUs) and 3,452 secondary schools and 219 colleges in England. We do not know how many independent 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 total figure would leave £1.6m per year for DfE operation and management of the grant; in Wales, it would leave £300k.</p> |
| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>This is a recommendation intended to be delivered universally across England and Wales. As noted in the evidence warrant section, this is imperative given how widespread relationship violence is. Of course, it is also explicitly targeted towards supporting and protecting girls from violence.</p> |

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| <p>Recommendation 6</p> | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation?</p> | <p>Education settings play a key role in safeguarding children from violence.</p> <p>As previously noted, statutory safeguarding guidance across England and Wales recognises the vital role that education settings play. The guidance requires that these settings ensure that appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and actively used and that they engage in their role in multi-agency work, proactively share information and actions, ensure staff undergo appropriate training and create</p> |

cultures where children feel safe to speak out and share any concerns they have.⁹⁰ Statutory safeguarding guidance also makes explicit reference to education settings' role in protecting children from involvement in violence.⁹¹

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.

KCSIE 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.⁹² Keeping Learners Safe has the same requirements for teachers in Wales.⁹³ Teaching staff receive this training from a variety of sources, including charities (e.g. the NSPCC), local authorities and professional bodies. 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 reported receiving no training on serious violence in the last two years.⁹⁴ This is contributing to critical gaps in teacher and DSL knowledge. KCSIE 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**'.⁹⁵ However, almost a third of teachers in England (30%) who were surveyed in the December 2024 reported 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' that they could do so.⁹⁶

Aside from safeguarding specifically, as noted in the evidence underpinning Recommendation 1, there are broader gaps in teacher knowledge on how to prevent 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 preventing children's involvement in violence.⁹⁷ More specifically, a majority of teachers identify knife awareness lessons or assemblies (57%), police officers delivering classroom lessons (58%) and trauma-informed

⁹⁰ DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges*, 2024

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf); Welsh Government, *Keeping Learners Safe: The Role of Local Authorities, Governing Bodies and Proprietors of Independent Schools Under the Education Act 2022*, 2022 (<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-04/220401-keeping-learners-safe.pdf>).

⁹¹ DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges*, 2024

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf). For instance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education* 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) and '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' (pp. 160, 167). 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 2023: A guide to Multi-agency Working to Help, Protect and Promote the Welfare of Children*, 2023 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cb4349a7ded0000c79e4e1/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_statutory_guidance.pdf).

⁹² DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges*, 2024

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf).

⁹³ Welsh Government, *Keeping Learners Safe: The Role of Local Authorities, Governing Bodies and Proprietors of Independent Schools Under the Education Act 2022*, 2022

(<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-04/220401-keeping-learners-safe.pdf>).

⁹⁴ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 7,331 teachers on 03 December 2024

⁹⁵ DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, 2024 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf)

⁹⁶ Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 7,298 teachers on 03 December 2024

⁹⁷ Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 9,886 teachers on 17 January 2025

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.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, only 40% of teachers think CBT is an evidence-based strategy for violence reduction, despite this intervention being supported by evidence.^{99,100} Notably, 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.¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰²

The recommendation sets out proposed content for potential NPQ ‘learn that...’ and ‘learn how to...’ statements; these are all underpinned by rigorous evidence.

These draw from a range of YEF resources, including:

- *Eight Key Facts About Violence* (2024)
- *Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024* (2024)
- *Education, Children and Violence: Guidance for School, College and Alternative Provision Leaders to Help Prevent Children’s Involvement in Violence* (2024)
- YEF Toolkit.

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

CfEY and MMU recently conducted a (YEF-funded) review of safeguarding practice in education and, specifically, how education settings are safeguarding children from involvement in violence. A review of the existing literature, interviews with 43 safeguarding professionals across England and Wales, and a survey of 7,000 teachers in England (alongside additional consultation with an expert advisory group) led to a range of insights for policy and practice. One insight and suggestion from the review called on the DfE in England to incorporate content on serious violence into the suite of NPQs and establish a new NPQ that DSLs and deputy DSLs could specifically benefit from.¹⁰³

RAND Europe, Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales, 2025.

Another YEF-commissioned review, RAND’s *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, also makes the case for better training for teachers on violence reduction. Following a literature review, interviews with 50 education practitioners and policy experts and a subsequent Delphi policy development exercise, the review explains that:

‘Our interviewees highlighted that gaps and inconsistencies in the skill sets of school staff were a key challenge for delivering effective practice that prevents violence by keeping children in education, providing trusted adults and supporting the development of social

⁹⁸ YEF, *YEF Toolkit* (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/>); YEF is conducting RCTs on trauma-informed practice in schools and on police presence in classrooms, with results expected in 2026 and 2027.

⁹⁹ Survey results here come from two questions asked by Teacher Tapp on 17 January 2025; one question was directed to 4,777 teachers, and the other to 5,004 teachers.

¹⁰⁰ YEF, *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/cognitive-behavioural-therapy/>)

¹⁰¹ Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 4,653 secondary teachers on 19 December 2024

¹⁰² 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/>)

¹⁰³ CfEY and MMU, *Safeguarding, Education and Serious Violence in England and Wales*, 2025.

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| | <p>and emotional skills. Interviewees and Delphi participants agreed that people working in schools are not always equipped with suitable and adequate training or professional development to develop these skills.’</p> <p>The review called for new professional development opportunities for teachers that are explicitly focused on violence reduction.¹⁰⁴</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>This recommendation aims to make use of an existing training delivery structure: the NPQs. The NPQ system has been shown to be feasible, and rather than establishing a standalone, separate form of qualification, this recommendation benefits from an existing structure and delivery mechanism. The DfE in England also recently announced a consultation on the reform of NPQs, providing an ideal opportunity to make the case for this recommendation and push for change. The aforementioned review by CfEY and MMU, following extensive consultation, also judged this recommendation to be feasible.</p> <p>With regards to cost, the first part of this recommendation (incorporating content on preventing children’s involvement in violence into existing NPQs) would be very cost-effective, requiring no additional investment. Establishing a new NPQ on keeping children safe would also only cost a small amount in central government administrative costs. Further targeting of a new NPQ to the areas most in need would cost a relatively small sum (see the next section).</p> <p>The recommendation and, specifically, the establishment of an NPQ that can improve the knowledge of DSLs, in particular, draws support from secondary teachers in England. Fifty-nine per cent of the teachers in England (and half of the DSLs) surveyed in December 2024 agree that DSLs should undertake an NPQ.¹⁰⁵ The proposal is significantly more popular in secondary settings than in primary settings: 72% of secondary teachers (and 64% of secondary heads) support it, compared to 45% of primary teachers (and 39% of primary heads).¹⁰⁶</p> <p>Our knowledge of the provision of safeguarding training in Wales is more limited, as the Teacher Tapp surveys only cover England. We therefore recommend that the Welsh Government should consult on adding an NPQ (or similar qualification) to the suite of career-long professional learning opportunities available to teachers.¹⁰⁷</p> <p>An alternative recommendation across both England and Wales could be to just add new, additional content to statutory safeguarding guidance documents, such as KCSIE in England and Keeping Learners Safe in Wales. However, these are already long documents, and just adding more content to them misses an opportunity to deliver detailed, evidence-informed content to professionals.</p> |

¹⁰⁴ RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

¹⁰⁵ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 2,207 teachers on 3 December 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Teacher Tapp survey answered by 2,207 teachers on 3 December 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Hwb, *Career-long Professional Learning*, n.d. (<https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-learning/career-long-professional-learning/>).

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| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>The training proposed in this recommendation intends to train teachers to ‘learn that...’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 AP settings, those with severe absenteeism and those who have previously offended.¹⁰⁸ • Children are at greatest risk of involvement in violence immediately after school (between 4 and 6 pm).¹⁰⁹ • 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.¹¹⁰ • Crime and violence typically peak during late adolescence and early adulthood and then steadily decline. This phenomenon is often called ‘the age–crime curve’.¹¹¹ <p>The training is also intended to train teachers to ‘learn how to...’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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), in addition to a range of other targeted interventions • Target efforts at the places and times where violence occurs by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 coordinate a collective safeguarding response. <p>Training teachers on these ‘learn that...’ and ‘learn how to...’ points will explicitly support them in targeting and supporting children who are most vulnerable to violence.</p> <p>The recommendation also calls for specific, targeted funding to ensure that education settings in the areas most in need receive support. The recommendation explains that, 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 with the highest proportion of disadvantaged children.¹¹² Following the establishment of a new NPQ on keeping children safe, we recommend that the DfE in England should cover the full cost for a DSL in secondary schools and colleges in areas of high violence and in all AP settings. 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. This cost is based on the following assumptions:</p> |
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¹⁰⁸ Jasmine Rollings et al., *An Examination of the Association Between School Absence, Exclusion and Violent Crime*, in press; Maria Fuller and Jenny McNally, *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).

¹⁰⁹ YEF, *Eight Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf).

¹¹⁰ YEF, *Eight Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf).

¹¹¹ YEF, *Eight Key Facts About Violence*, 2024 (https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/YEF_KeyFactsAboutViolence_6.pdf).

¹¹² DfE, *Funding for National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)*, last updated 10 February 2025 (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-national-professional-qualifications-npqs>).

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assumed cost for each teacher completing the NPQ is circa £1.6k, which is similar to the cost of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) NPQ¹¹³ • There are 14 further education colleges and 176 secondary schools in Wales, as well as 22 PRUs. Adding together the target settings (20% of secondary schools and colleges) and all PRUs equals 60 settings. 60x1,600 is £96,000. • 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 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. This makes the total number of target settings in England 1,234. 1,234x1,600 is £1,974,400. |
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| Recommendation 7 | Scale up impactful attendance improvement interventions and publish a strategy to improve attendance in AP in England and EOTAS in Wales. |
| What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation? | <p>Absence from education increases a child's risk of later involvement in violence (particularly for the most vulnerable children).</p> <p>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.¹¹⁴ A study by Rollings et al., which will be published in late May 2025, will provide further detail on this analysis.</p> <p>Indeed, being in education settings can reduce the risk that a child will become involved in serious violence. Support for this may be derived from the DfE's report <i>Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Multi-level Modelling</i>. There are seven different regression models in the analysis of the relationship between persistent absence for unauthorised other (PAUO) reasons and serious violence. Six out of these seven models show a significant positive relationship between PAUO and violence. Children who are PAUO are between 1.2 and 2 times more likely to commit a serious violence 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). This suggests that not being in school increases the risk of involvement with violence.¹¹⁵ Further evidence may be found in Ullman et al. (2024); the researchers identified the constructs that have evidence of a protective (negative) association with recidivism: rejection or absence of drug or alcohol use, good family relationships and support, and education and employment opportunities. Once again, involvement in school and education appears to protect children. In addition, academic achievement was also noted as having a possible protective association with non-violent offending and violence.¹¹⁶</p> <p>Further to this, we know that schools, colleges and AP can play a protective role by providing children with trusted adults, offering a safe environment, safeguarding children from harm and delivering a variety of approaches that make violence less likely. More information on these interventions and the evidence that underpins them can be found in the YEF's education practice guidance.¹¹⁷</p> |

¹¹³ Ambition Institute, *National Professional Qualification for SENCOs*, n.d. (<https://www.ambition.org.uk/programmes/npqsenco/>).

¹¹⁴ Jasmine Rollings et al., *An Examination of the Association Between School Absence, Exclusion and Violent Crime*, in press.

¹¹⁵ Maria Fuller and Jenny McNally, *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).

¹¹⁶ Roz Ullman et al., *Constructs Associated with Youth Crime and Violence Amongst 6–18 Year Olds: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews, Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 75, 2024

(<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2023.101906>).

¹¹⁷ 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/>).

Absence is rising.

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%).¹¹⁸ In Wales, almost a third (30.4%) of pupils were persistently absent in 2023–24, a figure that has more than doubled since 2018–19 (14.7%).¹¹⁹

Absence in AP and EOTAS is particularly concerning.

As previously noted, children in AP in England are significantly more likely to be cautioned or sentenced for serious violence offences. Between 2012 and 2015, 14% of Key Stage 4 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).¹²⁰ 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%.¹²¹ Estyn has also expressed concern regarding the attendance rate in PRUs in Wales.¹²²

The challenge we currently have is a lack of evidence for what works to reduce absence.

As the Education Endowment Foundation’s rapid evidence assessment on attendance explains, the evidence base for reducing absence is severely limited.¹²³ The YEF’s practice guidance acknowledges these limitations and sets out what we can recommend, including meeting with parents of absent children to discuss the reasons for low attendance and develop strategies to improve it, communicating with parents, and providing breakfast clubs.¹²⁴

However, we await the findings of a range of YEF-funded evaluations (detailed in the systems guidance: Recommendation 7, Table 4) that will provide further information on what might work to improve attendance.

Targeting vulnerable children.

If evaluations demonstrate positive results, the DfE in England and the Welsh Government should invest in the expansion of such evaluations that 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. This is because there are other risk factors (aside from absence) that are more associated with involvement with

¹¹⁸ DfE, *Autumn and Spring Term 2023/24: Pupil Absence in Schools in England*, 17 October 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2023-24-autumn-and-spring-term>).

¹¹⁹ Welsh Government, *Attendance of Pupils in Maintained Schools: 2 September 2024 to 14 February 2025*, last updated 25 February 2025 (<https://www.gov.wales/attendance-pupils-maintained-schools-2-september-2024-14-february-2025-html>).

¹⁴¹ 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).

¹²¹ DfE, *Autumn and Spring Term 2023/24: Pupil Absence in Schools in England*, 17 October 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2023-24-autumn-and-spring-term>).

¹²² Estyn, *Sector Report 2023–2024: Pupil Referral Units*, 2025 (<https://annual-report.estyn.gov.wales/2024-2/pru/>).

¹²³ Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), *Attendance Interventions: Rapid Evidence Assessment*, 2022 (<https://d2tic4wvvoliusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/pages/Attendance-REA-report.pdf?v=1705993938>).

¹²⁴ EEF, *Attendance Interventions: Rapid Evidence Assessment*, 2022 (<https://d2tic4wvvoliusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/pages/Attendance-REA-report.pdf?v=1705993938>).

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| | <p>violence. In the DfE report <i>Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Multi-level Modelling</i>, children who received a suspension in Years 7–10 were between four and five times more likely to be cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence; children in need were approximately twice as likely; children cautioned or sentenced for a separate non-serious violence offence were three to four times more likely; and children attending AP were two to four times more likely.¹²⁵ We also know that the vast majority of children (98%) who are persistently absent do not go on to commit serious violence.¹²⁶ Therefore, we want to ensure that the most vulnerable children receive support to get them back into school (as they are most at risk of involvement in violence).</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>We await the findings of YEF-funded attendance improvement evaluations before ascertaining the feasibility and cost of attendance improvement interventions. This is what good, evidence-based practice looks like: piloting and then evaluating interventions via robust, causal methods before scaling up nationally.</p> |
| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>Absence disproportionately impacts certain children. For instance, a greater proportion of Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish Traveller heritage, children of White and Black Caribbean, Black Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Irish ethnicity are persistently absent when compared with the average in England.¹²⁷ In Wales, Gypsy and Roma Traveller children and children of mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnicity have the poorest attendance rates.¹²⁸ Children with SEND and children eligible for FSM are also more likely to be absent from school.¹²⁹</p> <p>In addition, this recommendation makes an explicit request to target any scale-up of attendance improvement interventions at the children most vulnerable to involvement in violence (see the evidence warrant section, above).</p> |

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| <p>Recommendation 8</p> | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>What is the evidence warrant for this recommendation?</p> | <p>Education in youth custody is unacceptably poor and requires urgent government attention; this has been outlined by a range of organisations, including Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner.</p> <p>In October 2024, Ofsted and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons published a report detailing the 'decade of declining quality of education in YOIs [young offender institutions]'. 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</p> |

¹²⁵ Maria Fuller and Jenny McNally, *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).

¹²⁶ 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).

¹²⁷ DfE, *Autumn and Spring Term 2023/24: Pupil Absence in Schools in England*, 17 October 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2023-24-autumn-and-spring-term>).

¹²⁸ Welsh Government, *Attendance of Pupils in Maintained Schools: 2 September 2024 to 14 February 2025*, last updated 25 February 2025 (<https://www.gov.wales/attendance-pupils-maintained-schools-2-september-2024-14-february-2025-html>).

¹²⁹ DfE, *Week 29 2024: Pupil Attendance in Schools*, last updated 26 September 2024 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools/2024-week-29>).

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| | <p>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.¹³⁰</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.¹³¹ <p>An additional 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.¹³²</p> |
| <p>Is this recommendation feasible to deliver?</p> | <p>This is not an easy problem to solve. Indeed, 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).^{133,134}</p> <p>This is why the YEF is calling here for an initial, joint strategy across the DfE in England, MoJ, and Welsh Government. Establishing a strategy is completely free, and while it will not solve the problem without careful and committed implementation, the YEF is including this recommendation to highlight the urgent need for improvements.</p> |
| <p>Does this recommendation support the most vulnerable children and disproportionately affected groups?</p> | <p>Poor educational outcomes in youth custody are disproportionately felt by Black 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.¹³⁵ 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</p> |

¹³⁰ Ofsted and HMI Prisons, *A Decade of Declining Quality of Education in Young Offender Institutions: The Systemic Shortcomings That Fail Children*, 2024 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thematic-review-of-the-quality-of-education-in-young-offender-institutions-yois/a-decade-of-declining-quality-of-education-in-young-offender-institutions-the-systemic-shortcomings-that-fail-children>).

¹³¹ Children’s Commissioner, *The Educational Journeys of Children in Secure Settings*, 2025 (<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/the-educational-journeys-of-children-in-secure-settings/>).

¹³² CfEY and University of Oxford, *Education, Violence and the SEND System in England and Wales: A Policy and Practice Review*, 2025; RAND Europe, *Education and Violence: A Policy and Practice Review of England and Wales*, 2025.

¹³³ HMI Prisons, *Children’s Custody: A Decade of Missed Opportunities and Decline*, 2024 (<https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/news/childrens-custody-a-decade-of-missed-opportunities-and-decline/>).

¹³⁴ MoJ, *Government Response to Charlie Taylor’s Review of the Youth Justice System*, 2016 (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a817a1ae5274a2e87dbdd72/youth-justice-review-government-response-print.pdf>). The UK government committed to closing YOIs and opening secure schools, agreeing with Charlie Taylor’s vision that young offender institutions (YOIs) ‘should be replaced in the longer term by smaller secure schools situated in the regions that they serve.

¹³⁵ Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, *Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024*, 30 January 2025 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024#children-in-youth-custody>).

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| | <p>– over seven times their population share.¹³⁶ This recommendation, therefore, has the potential to improve race equity and address a clear inequity.</p> <p>We also know that children in the secure estate have often committed violent offences and are at significant risk of committing offences upon release. 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.¹³⁷</p> |
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¹³⁶ HMI Prisons, *Children in Custody 2022–23, 2023* (https://hmiprison.justiceinspectores.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/children-in-custody-2022-23/); HMI Prisons, *Children in Custody 2023–24, 2024* (https://hmiprison.justiceinspectores.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/children-in-custody-2023-24/).

¹³⁷ Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, *Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024*, 30 January 2025 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024#children-in-youth-custody>).