Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime

Lessons from London

This report summarises our findings and recommendations from a research project in London on knife crime in education. The research was carried out in 29 schools, colleges and pupil referral units in London and included focus groups with parents and children. We have condensed our findings into recommendations that focus on six areas of practice and policy that need further consideration from central government, local government and school leaders.

No single agency, including schools, can solve knife crime on its own. But there are some areas of focus for schools and wider agencies individually, and together, that can be tightened to keep children and young people safer. The areas for consideration include:

- improving partnership working and strategic planning in London
- sharing and promoting good practice in relation to exclusions and managed moves
- coordinating early help and prevention
- improving information-sharing
- teaching the curriculum and supporting children to achieve.

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Contents

Introduction **3**
Context 4
Purpose of the research 7
Methods 8
Recommendations **10**
Improving partnership working and strategic planning 11
Exclusions and managed moves 16
Early help and prevention 21
Improving information-sharing 23
Teaching the curriculum 26
Conclusion **30**
Appendix 1 – The recommendations **31**
Appendix 2 – School survey **33**
Appendix 3 – Expert advisory panel **37**

Introduction

1. Agencies and political leaders across London want to do more to protect children from knife crime and they are searching for answers. Many are acting independently or in partnership to do the right thing, but it is difficult, not least because London's leaders are each managing competing (and sometimes conflicting) priorities, each acting largely with autonomy but within rules set out in statutory guidance.

2. London has thousands of schools, colleges and pupil referral units (PRUs) across 33 local authorities (LAs). Our education system is complex. There is a mix of academies, free schools and maintained schools. Also, the Metropolitan Police Service is by far the largest police service in England.

3. All these groups want to do more to address knife crime, but coordination across these agencies is difficult – not least because the resources available to them are finite. Our research points to some of the views held by schools, parents and children about how knife crime is handled by schools and some of the different approaches being taken.

4. Knife crime has a huge impact on children and the communities in which they live, and not just in London but nationally. It is a societal problem and it cannot be tackled by schools or single agencies alone.[1] It is important that the findings of this report are read in that context. Schools can only do so much. They must identify, support, help and protect children on the school site, and they can do their best to teach them about the dangers of knives and related dangers. They can also teach them to read, write and add up, allowing them to achieve in school and experience success. But children need everyone in society – the police, LAs, health, youth services, welfare services, housing services, local communities, their parents, social media providers and so on – to work together and to put children first and protect them from county lines, gangs, knives, drugs and from adults who pose a risk to them.

5. The findings from this report are based on data from London, but much in the recommendations applies equally across the country.

6. Our recommendations focus on the areas that school leaders, parents and children told us needed more joined-up working, particularly in a fragmented system; recognising the need for schools to have autonomy but within limits. Our hope is that the insight into schools provided by this report, along with the overwhelming desire by different agencies to reduce the prevalence of knife crime, will create a momentum across London to agree protocols and ways of working that better protect vulnerable children.

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[1] When we refer to schools throughout this report, we are referring also to colleges and pupil referral units, with which we also carried out fieldwork.

7. The recommendations in this report should be interpreted broadly and we have deliberately refrained from being too specific about how they should be implemented. The recommendations are focused on the areas that school leaders told us need more joined-up working, which includes schools working better together. They also focus only on those things that would help create the conditions for schools to fulfil their roles as best they can. This report should not be read as a definitive list of solutions to knife crime.

Context

8. Knife crime is a term used commonly in the media to refer, primarily, to street-based knife assaults and knife-carrying. However, there are many different criminal offences relating to knives. For example:

   - it is an offence to threaten or cause harm to a person with a bladed weapon
   - some bladed weapons are prohibited from being sold or purchased, including to anyone under the age of 18
   - offences such as robbery or assault can be aggravated if a knife is involved
   - it is also an offence to carry a knife in a public place without good reason.[2]

9. In this report, when we refer to knife crime, we are referring both to the use of knives against children either to threaten or to wound them and to instances when children may have been carrying or using knives for a range of purposes.[3]

10. In the 12 months to September 2018, knife crime had increased by 68.4% across England and Wales (excluding the Greater Manchester Police area) compared with 12 months up to September 2014 and by 55.5% across the Metropolitan Police Service area of London over the same period.[4] Public perception of knife crime being a problem in London has increased and 26% of respondents to the London Public Attitude Survey 2018 felt that knife crime was a problem compared with 20% a year earlier.[5] The number of sharp instruments found on school property has increased. Data from 21 police forces in England and Wales obtained through a freedom of information request showed that 363 sharp instruments were found on school property in 2017–18.

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[2] Prevention of Crime Act 1953; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/1-2/14/contents.
Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/7-8/37/contents.
Criminal Justice Act 1988; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/33/contents.
Offensive Weapons Act 1996; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/26/contents.
Knives Act 1997; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/21/contents.

[3] There are examples in this report of incidents involving knives, bladed weapons or other weapons that are not, or were not, responded to as criminal offences.

[4] Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables to September 2018 – Knife crime open data; www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables.

[5] MOPAC weapon enabled crime dashboard; www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/weapon-enabled-crime-dashboard.

This is a rise from 269 in 2013–14.[6] Research also shows that pupils who self-report as being a victim of knife crime are twice as likely to carry a knife themselves compared with non-victims.[7] Therefore, as we see an increase in victims or fear of knife crime, we can expect to see an increase in perpetrators of knife-carrying and knife crime among both adults and children.

11. It is clear that knife crime is an increasing safeguarding risk to children, both at school and in their local communities. While we have not sought to answer the question of the causes of knife crime, leaders told us that, in their experience, children are in three categories of risk of knife-carrying:

    - The highest level of risk is for those children who have been groomed into gangs, for the purposes of criminal exploitation.[8]
    - Underneath this lies a group of children who have witnessed other children carrying knives, have been the victim of knife crime or know someone who has carried a knife for protection or status-acquisition or who are encouraged to believe knife-carrying is normal through the glamorisation of gangs and knives on social media.
    - Then there are children who carry knives to school as an isolated incident. For example, they may carry a penknife that a grandparent has gifted them.

12. Knife crime is just one issue among many faced by children that leaders in schools have to understand and manage on a daily basis. As one designated safeguarding leader put it:

    > 'If you asked a teacher who was in charge of knives, they wouldn't know: I'm the drug woman, the knife woman and the sex woman'.

    It is important to remember that knife crime does not exist in a vacuum and children who are victims or perpetrators may also be experiencing multiple vulnerabilities.

13. The common denominator of pupils who are found carrying bladed objects into school is their vulnerability. Leaders were clear that, almost invariably, these children have experienced poverty, abuse or neglect or are living within troubled families. They may also experience social exclusion due to factors such as their race or socio-economic background. School leaders said that all the pupils who have been permanently excluded because of a knife-related incident

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[6] Ben Butcher and Rachel Schraer, 'How do we know how many children are in gangs?', 28 February 2019; www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47388890.
[7] 'Youth Survey 2008: young people in mainstream education', Youth Justice Board, 2009; www.most.ie/webreports/march2010/MORI_08_fullreport_EDU.pdf and 'Youth voice survey 2018', Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC); www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/youth_voice_survey_report_2018_final.pdf.
[8] Exploitation is defined in Modern Slavery Act 2015, part 1, section 3; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/section/3/enacted.

had at least one of these characteristics. School leaders also told us that those involved were also more likely to be low attainers academically compared with their peers.

14. Staff and school leaders are generally confident that children are safe from knife crime at school and children confirmed this. Leaders say that they keep pupils safe on the premises through policies and practice, their zero-tolerance approach to bladed objects, their clear expectations of pupils' behaviour, good levels of supervision at the start and end of the school day, including on the school gate and at the bus stops, and the visibility, albeit reduced, of a police officer at the school. Examples of knife incidents at school contained in this report tend to be several years old. According to our sample, they occur infrequently.

15. The most dangerous time for children is shortly after school, between 4pm and 6pm.[9] So, while children might be safe on site, their safety after school is a concern for children, their parents and their teachers. Several schools told us that they endeavour to keep pupils safe on arrival and departure from school by ensuring staff presence at the bus drop-offs and supervision there until the pupils have left. Leaders also set high expectations regarding pupils' behaviour on the buses and out of school. Indeed, several of the permanent exclusions for knife-related incidents that leaders talked about resulted from incidents that took place outside school or at the weekends.

16. It is clear that children need help and support to prevent them becoming either victims or perpetrators of knife crime. As such, local responses to knife crime are being framed within the context of the government's Serious Violence Strategy[10] and in London by The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime's (MOPAC) London Knife Crime Strategy.[11] Both strategies identify that, in addition to law enforcement, multi-agency and partnership work with children is crucial to addressing knife crime that affects them.

17. It is important to note that the issue of relative poverty is an important factor in knife crime among children and young people. The underlying socio-economic drivers behind knife crime cannot be ignored. Wider considerations of the lived experiences of children growing up in poverty and, in particular, in areas with

[9] S Mayor, 'Under 16s are at highest risk of being stabbed going home from school, UK study finds', British Medical Journal 2018; 363 doi, November 2018 (behind paywall); www.bmj.com/content/363/bmj.k4721.
[10] 'Serious violence strategy', Home Office, 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy.
[11] 'The London knife crime strategy', MOPAC, 2017; www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications/mayors-knife-crime-strategy-putting-stop-knife-crime-london.

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disorder problems, must form part of a multi-agency response to knife crime.[12] This is no easy task.

18. The context within which multi-agency and partnership working takes place means agencies face many challenges. LA children's services are dealing with increasing demand to support the most vulnerable children and many have significantly reduced budgets for preventative services in order to protect specialist social care services.

19. In recent years, the role of LAs in education has changed with the growth of academies. LAs, partners and schools are having to reconfigure the way they join up their response to safeguarding across all education settings in their area. The voluntary and community sectors, which are often well placed to make an important contribution to multi-agency and partnership work, have encountered increasingly short-term funding that makes it difficult for them to plan their contributions for the long term.[13] In short, the environment in which agencies are trying to respond effectively to rising knife crime is challenging.

Purpose of the research

20. All of those charged with keeping children and communities safe and preventing violent crime and exploitation agree that there are many complexities involved in addressing the issue of knife crime. This research does not intend to address the whole spectrum of factors that can contribute to keeping children safe from crime but seeks to identify ways in which policy makers and school leaders in London can support practice in schools more effectively.

21. The research has been carried out in London, but the findings are intended to assist national policy makers and school leaders in considering their current and future approaches to tackling knife crime in London and across the country. The causes of knife crime may differ across the country, but there are some common themes as to how schools can best be supported and best tackle the issue.

22. This research project explored three broad questions:

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[12] 'Young people and crime: findings from the 2005 offending, crime and justice survey', Wilson, D., et al., London: Home Office, 2006; https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6902.
'Young people and street crime', Fitzgerald M. and Stockdale, J., London: Youth Justice Board, 2003; http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/14045.

[13] 'Death of public sector grants will damage people and communities', Directory of Social Change, 2016; www.dsc.org.uk/content/death-of-public-sector-grants-will-damage-people-and-communities.
'Youth Work Inquiry: recommendations and summary', All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, October 2018; www.nya.org.uk/appg-report-2018.

- What are schools, colleges and PRUs in London, under their safeguarding duty, doing to safeguard children/learners from knife crime while on school premises?
- How are schools, colleges and PRUs in London giving children the knowledge and skills to stay safer in their local communities?
- How are exclusions being used when children bring knives to school?

23. Last year, we completed related work, in conjunction with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in November 2018, and published our joint report, 'Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern child slavery: an addendum'.[14] The questions for this research were designed to look more closely at the role of schools than at the role of social care or partner agencies. The reports are best read in conjunction with one another.

Methods

24. To restrict the project to a manageable size, we decided to limit the research to secondary education, alternative provision and further education, in other words children aged 11 and upwards. That does not mean that children under this age, or at primary school, are unaffected. In fact, they very much can be. All primary schools and partner agencies should ensure that they are carrying out preventative work with this age group. It is something many of the secondary school leaders involved in this research felt strongly about also.

Expert panel group

25. We formed an expert panel group to test our ideas, provide help and support and provide challenge to our methods and findings. This group was made up of academics, charitable organisations, headteachers, parents, youth workers and ex-gang members, all of whom have expertise in peer-on-peer violence, knife crime, policing, criminal exploitation or all of the above. The group met twice, at the beginning of the study and at the end of evidence collection, to inform both the methodology and to assist us in framing the findings.[15]

[14] 'Protecting children from criminal exploitation human trafficking modern slavery: an addendum', Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Probation, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, November 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-inspections-of-child-sexual-exploitation-and-missing-children.

[15] See Appendix 1 for a list of the organisations who participated in the expert panel group.

Survey to schools

26. First, we developed and circulated a survey to all secondary schools, alternative provision and further education colleges in London (circa 600).[16] The purpose of this survey was to give us an overview of some of what schools are doing with regards to knife crime to help us develop our research questions further and to design the rest of the study. This survey also gave us our sample, because school leaders were given the option at the end to put themselves forward to take part in the second phase: visiting their school and carrying out semi-structured interviews with school leaders on the topic of knife crime.

27. We felt that it was important that schools had the choice to put themselves forward. This is a particularly sensitive issue for schools in London – some will have lost pupils to knife crime. Additionally, the purpose of this research was not to get a representation of absolutely everything that schools are doing, nor was it to evaluate how well schools are doing it. We wanted to understand from schools, particularly those who are very engaged with the issue, from their perspective what is working and what is not, as well as what more they think is needed.

Interviews and focus groups

28. We received 107 responses to our survey, from which we chose 29 schools to visit. That included six PRUs, six further education colleges and 17 secondary (both academy and maintained) schools.[17] We visited each school and completed 29 in-depth interviews (approximately two hours each) with school leaders, including headteachers, principals and designated safeguarding leads.[18] We asked a range of questions covering four key areas:

    - school policy and procedure on knives
    - knife crime in the curriculum
    - safeguarding children from knife crime
    - working with other agencies.

    The data from these interviews was analysed using thematic analysis using standard qualitative software.

29. We decided not to speak to children in the schools about knife crime, for ethical and safeguarding reasons. Children may have had friends or family injured or killed by knife crime, may be very fearful of it or may be concerned that other pupils would know they have spoken to us, which could put them in danger

[16] See Appendix 2 for a copy of the survey.
[17] Across a total of 18 LAs.
[18] We had asked to speak with headteachers and principals, some of whom chose to bring their designated safeguarding lead or other leaders who had responsibilities that were relevant to the research.

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outside of school. Instead, we contacted our headteachers reference group in the London region, which arranged four focus groups with approximately 12 children per group. The headteachers were careful to ensure that the groups were representative and that they had considered the ethical issues above.

30. Additionally, we held a small focus group with four parents facilitated by one of our expert panel members. All four mothers had sons of around the same age who had been groomed into criminal exploitation and who had been both perpetrators and victims of knife crime over many years. The parents, although acquainted through a support group, were from different communities and different areas of London.

Ethics and safeguarding

31. Details of our ethics and safeguarding procedures will be published on our website soon.

Limitations of the research

32. The limitations of the research include:

- It is not representative of all practices in schools across London and should not be read as such. We have explored, in detail, the complexities that some schools are facing.
- The sample of schools were self-selecting and, therefore, not a random sample.
- We have not aimed to explore the causes or solutions to knife crime. The findings are limited to what improvements could be made that would help schools to do the work they are doing more easily or effectively.

Recommendations

33. We have identified five policy and practice areas that we feel need further consideration by policy leaders and school leaders to help to create an environment in which they can work as effectively as possible to keep children safe. The five areas are:

- improving partnership working and strategic planning
- the use of exclusions and managed moves
- early help and intervention
- teaching the curriculum and supporting children to achieve
- working with parents.

Improving partnership working and strategic planning

Recommendation 1: Local community safety partnerships should fully involve schools, colleges and PRUs in developing and implementing local strategies that aim to address knife crime and serious youth violence.

34. The Mayor's knife crime strategy sets out the need to have a local plan to address knife crime in every LA area. The plan should be led by the Metropolitan Police Service, involving partners and overseen by local community safety partnerships.[19] Additionally, the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) has as one of its core principles that:

> 'Directors of Children's Services have a crucial role to play in acting as systems leaders to ensure that responses to serious youth violence and interconnected issues are effective, collaborative and multi-faceted'.[20]

35. However, there was a wide variation in how school leaders felt about the leadership and planning in their local areas to address knife crime. Some school leaders reported a lack of direction in their local area on tackling knife crime and they did not feel supported despite the Mayor's knife crime strategy. ALDCS noted in its review of LA responses to knife crime in 2018, that:

> 'while partnerships between various services within the local authority and the Police were common, fewer respondents mentioned the presence of education and health partners on the Board.'[21]

36. The schools in our sample felt that they were often acting in isolation in developing a curriculum response to the risk of knife crime, keeping children safe at school and managing children who are at risk of offending. This is despite the evidence of what works in violence prevention and government guidance, which points to the importance of a multi-agency approach and information-sharing.[22,23]

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[19] 'The London Knife Crime Strategy', MOPAC, 2017; www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications/mayors-knife-crime-strategy-putting-stop-knife-crime-london.
[20] 'The response of London children's services to serious youth violence and knife crime', ALDCS, May 2018; www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/34040.
[21] 'The response of London children's services to serious youth violence and knife crime', ALDCS, May 2018; www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/34040.
[22] 'Knife crime interventions: what works?', The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, 2013; www.sccjr.ac.uk/publications/knife-crime-interventions-what-works.
'What works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime: a rapid review of interventions delivered in the UK and abroad', Home Office/Early Intervention Foundation, 2015; www.eif.org.uk/report/what-works-to-prevent-gang-involvement-youth-violence-and-crime-a-rapid-review-of-interventions-delivered-in-the-uk-and-abroad.
'European report on preventing violence and knife crime among young people', World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2010; www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/european-report-on-preventing-violence-and-knife-crime-among-young-people.

Evidence, guidance and support on searching

37. One of the clearest examples of the lack of school involvement in the design and implementation of a strategy is the different approaches the schools in our sample had to searching children for the possession of weapons on entry to school (or indeed, and perhaps more commonly of concern, for drugs). Under the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006, teachers were given the power, once only held by the police, to stop and search children on entry to school.

38. While some proponents, and indeed schools in our sample, firmly believe that searching children on entry to school keeps children safer, others do not.[24] Interestingly, in one of our focus groups with children, in a school that did not search children for knives, one child who opposed the idea of searching said:

> 'we're at school, not in prison.'

Conversely, some schools that had introduced searching said that their children felt safer as a result, and once embedded in a normal routine, being searched in the morning on the way into school was just an ordinary part of the day.

39. Some leaders who used wands to carry out searches believed they had a 'massive impact'. One headteacher said:

> 'We did it three or four times and found drugs for personal use, some weapons which we passed to the police and discussed this with young people. After this we found nothing in subsequent searches. We are confident the message has got out to students.'

It is clear that searching, done sensitively, can be done without ostracising children.

'Tackling youth knife crime: practical advice for police', Home Office, 2009; www.knifecrimes.org/youth087a.pdf.
'Protecting people, promoting health: a public health approach to violence prevention for England', Department of Health, 2012; www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-public-health-approach-to-violence-prevention-in-england.
'Ending gang and youth violence: a cross-government report', HM Government, 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-and-youth-violence-cross-government-report.

[23] While a decade ago Glasgow was called the 'murder capital of Europe', now knife crime in Scotland is at a 42-year low. Scotland approached knife crime as a 'public health' issue, which meant that the police, social, health and school sectors worked closely together along with Scottish-funded violence reduction units to address it.
'About us', Violence Reduction Unit, retrieved 13 December 2018; www.actiononviolence.org.uk/about-us.

[24] 'Knife crime: sister of murdered teacher makes plea for schools to resist scanners', iNews, January 2018; https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/knife-crime-sister-murdered-teacher-makes-plea-schools-resist-scanners.

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40. On the other hand, one college had abandoned the use of knife arches, believing it to be detrimental to the students and to the reputation of the college. Students found ways to notify each other of checks, including those coordinated by the borough commander at tube stations. The principal there said:

> 'We need a broader approach, not just in the borough, but a London approach.'

41. In our sample, we heard of several different approaches to searching for knives:

- no routine searches: searches are intelligence-led, relying on third-party information
- searching pupils randomly either termly, fortnightly or weekly: this could involve knife arches, wands, bag searches or pat-downs; consent is either obtained by the pupils individually at the point of search or agreed with pupils and parents in the behaviour policy on enrolment
- searching pupils daily on entry to school, as above (most common in PRUs)
- searching pupils multiple times per day (most common in PRUs)
- perimeter searches of the surrounding area of the premises, sometimes carried out by police liaison/safer schools officers (SSO) and sometimes teachers/staff.

42. The Department for Education (DfE) has set out guidance for schools in relation to 'Searching, screening and confiscation at school'.[25] Meanwhile, the Mayor's Office has committed to supporting schools by 'offering the use of knife wands in areas where knife crime is most prevalent'.[26] However, only 250 schools in London have taken up the offer of a knife wand.[27]

43. What appears to be missing is a dialogue between local safeguarding partners and schools about the purpose of searching, the impact on staff and pupils and evidence of the impact on knife-carrying. While some schools told us that they had been offered wands, for example, they did not use them because the wands can only detect metal – as opposed to drugs or other banned items or substances that pupils might bring to school. Additionally, some schools were wary of beginning to search children in case it sent the wrong message to parents – that suddenly their children were less safe – or because the school

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[25] 'Searching, screening and confiscation at school', Department for Education, 2014 (updated January 2018); www.gov.uk/government/publications/searching-screening-and-confiscation.
[26] 'The London knife crime strategy', MOPAC, 2017; www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications/mayors-knife-crime-strategy-putting-stop-knife-crime-london.
[27] 'Most young Londoners feel safe in the capital, new survey reveals', MOPAC, January 2019; www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/most-young-londoners-feel-safe-in-the-capital.

100 yards away did not. This was particularly a concern for colleges, which felt that it would make them look less safe than competing schools in their area.

44. Searching pupils, while encouraged by the government when necessary, is an example of a strategy that has been adopted in a piecemeal way across schools in London. There are examples of searches in schools being carried out in an acceptable way, and body checks are common as a security measure in public places. It is not clear why such searches, if done sensitively and without bias, could not be successful in acting as a deterrent and encouraging discussion about issues, including knife crime.

45. Schools want to know what works, including what works in different contexts. They need strong local leadership in London that drives the implementation of local strategies that are regularly reviewed, and they need to be involved and to engage actively with the strategy development from the outset.

Criminalisation of young people carrying knives

46. School leaders have very different approaches to involving the police in incidents of knife-carrying. The approach varied widely between schools.

47. Some school leaders had a strong ethos against criminalising children, or calling the police, in response to a child bringing a bladed article into school. Others were firmly of the opinion that it is an offence and should be treated as such. But within these two approaches was a vast grey area in which school leaders made decisions, knew other leaders made decisions or said that they would potentially make decisions about contacting the police based on a variety of factors. Some of those factors included:

- whether the child is vulnerable
- whether it was a first offence
- the history of the child's behaviour more generally
- whether the child was thought to be, or known to be, affiliated with a gang
- the reason for which the child was carrying a knife, for example for protection or with the intention of harming someone
- whether the child was looked after or not[28]
- whether the child had any connections to adults with a history of violence or criminality in their family or family friends
- whether other children were aware that the blade had been brought to school
- the nature of the weapon, for example a compass, a corkscrew, a penknife, a kitchen knife, etc.

[28] A child is 'looked after' if they are in the care of the LA (for more than 24 hours).

- the relationship the school had with the child or parents
- the child's prior attainment.

48. School leaders had conflicting views about whether it was a criminal offence to carry a knife into school at all. They also reported that police officers do not take a consistent approach to children when making decisions to charge. One said they had been advised by their SSO that schools are not public places and so carrying a knife was not a criminal offence. Another school had called the police in response to a child carrying a small, sharp metal object (not a knife) for self-protection on the way to and from school when there was clear evidence that the child was in fact at risk during their journey. This child was arrested and charged.

49. This variation in practice may be contextual. Responding to individual circumstances is important, but schools would appreciate examples of when charges may or may not be brought. Almost all school leaders told us that it would depend on the circumstances, or factors listed above, as to whether they chose to call the police or not. What is concerning here is that this lends itself to a huge potential for bias – children who have a certain demeanour, a particular type of relationship with their teacher or a type of background may likely be criminalised for the same actions that other children would not, depending on which school they go to, and even within the same school.

50. Senior leaders and school staff must understand the law on knife-carrying and knife offences generally so that there is a common approach across London to responding to such incidents. These approaches will need to be flexible so that decision-makers can take all the information into account. However, the underlying principles cannot rely too heavily on individual leaders, teachers or police officers making decisions about how deserving or undeserving of prosecution children are based on their vulnerabilities, as opposed to the risk they present.[29]

Coordinating access to services

51. Aside from simply searching children, as ALDCS has highlighted, 'schools are very often the focus for both universal and targeted prevention activity'.[30] ALDCS, in 2018, had identified 'some' central LA support in delivering targeted and preventative activities in relation to gangs and gang prevention. What is apparent, however, is that the development of local area strategies and how much or how well schools are involved in these differs across LAs in London.

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[29] Guidance on this issue can be found here: 'Searching, screening and confiscation at school', DfE, 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/searching-screening-and-confiscation.
[30] 'The response of London Children's Services to serious youth violence and knife crime', ALDCS, May 2018; www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/34040.

52. Each LA/community safety partnership also has its own approaches to knife crime and related issues, its own types of support services and organisational structures reflecting its differing resources and assessment of needs. School leaders, particularly those working in schools where children came from many different LAs, told us that they struggle to know what services they can access for children and how best to do that, because the systems are so dependent on the LA in which that child lives. Under 'Keeping children safe in education', 'all [school] staff should be aware of their local early help process and understand their role in it'. Local safeguarding partnerships should coordinate their efforts to ensure that these processes are as clear and easily accessible to schools as possible across, and between, boroughs.

53. Some school leaders told us that there was no specific training provided to staff on how to deal with any incidents when a knife is detected, nor on how to deal with the aftermath of any incidents. In other schools, staff have had extensive training specifically on knife crime funded by the school, and in some boroughs on contextual safeguarding led by the LA or local safeguarding partnerships. When it had taken place, training delivered by the LA, police or Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was highly regarded, well received and valued.

54. The biggest barrier schools and other agencies face is cost, whether they are trying to fund extra resources to keep a child from being excluded, or to keep alternative provision open, or seeing reductions in the number of SSOs and police community support officers (PCSOs), who provided valuable support. Some are struggling to fund school-based early help services or find the same services that were once free for a cost they can afford, while others are using pupil premium to commission outside services to teach parts of the safeguarding curriculum. School leaders say they are struggling to do more with less. As one leader put it,

> 'A plea from me would be to have a much more coordinated response. There is not a quick cure – it's about prevention and we need to look at a prevention strategy and then an intervention strategy. These might look different at primary, secondary and further education'.

Exclusions and managed moves

Recommendation 2: All schools and academies in London should ensure that their exclusion policy reflects the practice set out in the Department for Education's statutory guidance. Local authorities should have a strategic response to permanent exclusions. They should also, in conjunction with regional schools commissioners, challenge schools and multi-academy trusts when exclusions do not appear to be in line with statutory guidance.

55. School leaders and LAs should follow the DfE 2017 statutory guidance on exclusions that says that the 'headteacher should take account of any contributing factors that are identified after an incident of poor behaviour has

occurred' and that in addition to early intervention to address underlying causes of disruptive behaviour, 'the headteacher should consider what extra support might be needed to identify and address the needs of pupils from [groups with disproportionately high rates of exclusion] in order to reduce the risk of exclusion'.[31]

56. This guidance on exclusions applies to exclusions because of knife-carrying as much as to any other behaviour management issue. Whether schools have a flexible approach or a more hard-line approach, all contributory factors as to why a child has carried a knife into school should be considered before they carry out an exclusion.

57. Headteachers we spoke to have different approaches as to whether they retain, exclude or move children to a different school who have been found to be carrying knives on the premises of a school or in the community. These can broadly be split into two:

    - The first approach considers the circumstances of the individual child and the intention the child had for carrying a knife. This approach tends to result in the child being retained at the school until all other possible options have been exhausted.[32]
    - The second approach prioritises the welfare or safety of the majority of children in the school and so leaders tend to immediately permanently exclude or they will encourage the parent and child to consider a managed move to another setting. Some schools told us that they have adopted a zero-tolerance approach[33] that they believed reflected an LA-led strategy/policy. In other cases, headteachers had chosen this approach as a deterrent to children who may otherwise carry knives into school.

58. While we did not review the detail of every exclusion, and many were clearly appropriate and correctly managed, there were also examples given by headteachers where they had or would exclude children immediately without considering early intervention and support to remain in the school. The most striking examples were of teenage girls being excluded for carrying a knife for the purposes of self-harm. In those examples, headteachers were clear that, if other children had seen the knife, they would undermine their zero-tolerance deterrent if they did not exclude. There were also examples of children who

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[31] 'Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England: statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion', DfE, 2017; www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion.

[32] We are currently carrying out research into how schools manage behaviour more generally, which is coming in the summer term 2019.

[33] In this report, we are using the term 'zero-tolerance approach' in the same way that the headteachers we spoke to used it. It means that the school policy is to immediately and permanently exclude a child who has been involved in carrying or using a knife against others, either at school or in the community. Schools that do not move to immediately exclude are also intolerant of knives, but they do not necessarily immediately seek to exclude children.

had been excluded for serious incidents, such as bringing a kitchen knife to school, but where the school had not made a safeguarding referral to the LA.

59. Schools with zero-tolerance policies provided examples of when they have avoided permanent exclusions despite pupils meeting the exclusion criteria regarding bladed objects. For example, one pupil stole a sharp implement from a classroom with the clear intent to cause harm. The school imposed a fixed-term exclusion but kept the pupil on roll, learning in the inclusion unit, so that she could complete her GCSEs. The school felt that it could do this without undermining its position in front of other pupils because no other pupils knew of the incident.

60. Other settings were stricter in their approach to zero-tolerance and exclusions. As one principal said:

> 'We have an absolute zero-tolerance policy and students have a very clear understanding that if they are caught with a knife they will receive a permanent exclusion. It does not matter if they say it wasn't their knife of if they have a reason for carrying it… there is no leeway'.

61. While, in general, the intention that the pupil had in carrying a knife was the key factor in determining whether or not a child would be excluded, being gang-affiliated (in secondaries and colleges, not PRUs) was also a trigger for expulsion. Leaders said things like: 'it just wasn't manageable to keep him in college'.

62. A child who is a risk to other children in one school is likely to be a risk to children in others and outside of school. Children who are excluded from school to PRUs have self-reported higher instances of knife-carrying than children who are not excluded. The 2018 MOPAC youth survey found that:

> 'When looking at PRU attendees, 47% (92 of 196) say they know someone who has carried a knife with them, compared with 25% of non-PRU attendees (1188 of 4673). Once again, it is a similar picture for exposure to gangs, with 46% of PRU attendees saying they know someone in a gang (87 of 191) compared with 22% of non-PRU attendees (1022 of 4585)'.[34]

63. However, it is not possible to conclude from this that exclusions are the cause of these behaviours, or even that they increase their likelihood. What it does tell us is that these children are more at risk.

64. One factor that schools, LAs and central government need to consider further is that children who are being groomed by gangs to deal drugs and/or carry knives may be being coached by dangerous adults to get themselves excluded.

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[34] 'Youth voice survey 2018', MOPAC; www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/youth_voice_survey_report_2018_final.pdf.

In our focus group with parents of children who have been both perpetrators and victims of knife crime, parents told us that their children had been encouraged by adult gang members to carry weapons into school for the sole purpose of triggering an exclusion. Once excluded, children may have fewer protective factors,[35] including access to trusted adults such as their teachers, depending on what happens to them as a result. If they are not admitted into another mainstream school or good-quality alternative provision or PRU, this can make them more vulnerable to potential criminality. Schools across London should ensure that they are working in tandem to both safeguard perpetrators and victims of knife crime. A child may be both at the same time.

65. School leaders are concerned, as are we, that some schools are not following practice as set out in DfE exclusions guidance. PRU headteachers in particular have concerns about rising numbers of younger pupils being excluded, as well as pupils with special educational needs/disabilities (SEND) and vulnerable girls. Many of the school leaders we spoke to were concerned that when accepting a child who had been excluded, they were not always being given all the information they needed to ensure that they could meet the needs of excluded children.

66. For some children, therefore, it seems that schools are not following practice as outlined in statutory guidance on school exclusions in terms of providing early help, assessing the wider needs of the child or considering the context in which the child lives fully enough.[36]

67. Given that permanent exclusions in secondary schools have been rising since 2012/13[37] and that there is a shortage of provision for excluded children, schools and LAs need to work together, with a clear strategy in place, to improve education and other preventative work to reduce the need for exclusion and to keep those who are excluded in education, training or employment.[38]

68. Permanent exclusions are a necessary and important sanction but there is a balance to be found when taking this most serious action. Schools should consider the best interest of pupils at risk of exclusion alongside the need to maintain safety in school and for exclusion to act as a deterrent. It is not acceptable to exclude without considering the impact on and the risks to the

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[35] 'The response of London children's services to serious youth violence and knife crime', ALDCS, May 2018; www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/34040.
[36] 'Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England: statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion', DfE, 2017; www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion.
[37] 'Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: 2016 to 2017', DfE, July 2018; www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2016-to-2017.
[38] 'The response of London children's services to serious youth violence and knife crime', ALDCS, May 2018; www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/34040.

child being excluded, especially when their behaviour does not present a risk to others.

Recommendation 3: The Department for Education should collect data from schools about managed moves in the same way in which it collects information on permanent and fixed-term exclusions.

69. Information is collected by central government about the number of, and reasons for, permanent and fixed-term exclusions to allow it, and LAs, to monitor disruption to children's mainstream education. However, school leaders spoke more often about using managed moves as a response to children's knife-carrying than they did about exclusions, in other words about moving children in a planned way to an alternative school rather than formally excluding them. Most often, these managed moves were permanent to another mainstream school, but sometimes they were to PRUs, and sometimes for only a limited or trial period.

70. We do not think that any single body has a clear picture, either in London or nationally, of the number of children who are 'managed-moved' to different schools, how long for and where to or for what reason. We also do not know what the educational outcomes for those children are, or whether managed moves do in fact effectively safeguard those children or keep them in mainstream education in the long term.

71. We heard several examples of pupils being 'manage-moved' because of knife incidents. One pupil who was carrying a knife who feared travelling to and from school because he lived in another borough was moved to a school that required a different route. The difficulty with this type of move is that we do not know if moving the child solved the problem in the short term or for good.

72. There is currently little evidence on the efficacy of managed moves. That is not to say that they are not effective in safeguarding children or ensuring that they continue, with as little interruption as possible, in their education. That may indeed be the case for many of the children who are subject to managed moves, and we know that in some cases they are used as an alternative to permanent exclusion. However, further evidence and research is needed before central and local government, headteachers and other stakeholders can be assured that managed moves are being used in the best interests of children, are keeping them and other children safe, and are leading to improved outcomes for the children concerned.[39]

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[39] T Messeter and A Soni, 'A systematic literature review of the 'managed move' process as an alternative to exclusion in UK schools', in 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties', Volume 23(2), 2018, pp. 169–185; www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632752.2017.1383676 (behind paywall).
K Hoyle, 'Secondary school pupils' experiences of managed moves: an interpretative phenomenological analysis', PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2016; http://repository.essex.ac.uk/17469 (behind paywall).

Early help and prevention

Recommendation 4: Safeguarding partners should involve school leaders at a strategic level in assessing the needs of children and young people in their area, and in planning and delivering early help services in response to those needs. Schools need to participate actively in local arrangements as required under 'Keeping children safe in education' statutory guidance.

Recommendation 5: Local safeguarding partnerships should facilitate all agencies including schools and colleges in challenging each other's practice if they believe any agency is failing to contribute to the local strategy to protect pupils from knife crime.

73. The DfE's statutory guidance ('Working together') on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children[40] requires local areas to have 'a comprehensive range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address assessed needs early'. This should draw on a local-needs assessment. Typically, these might involve early help services such as parenting programmes, support for children's mental health, domestic abuse, drug or alcohol misuse and responses to concerns in extra familial contexts.

74. Spending per head on early help and preventative services fell by over 60% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2016–17.[41] ALDCS identify that directing resources towards preventative services is 'extremely difficult'.[42] The short-term nature of some of the available funding can be a restrictive factor. It is important, therefore, that all agencies use their resources as efficiently as possible, which includes involving all agencies in the planning of early help services in local areas and, individually, for families.

75. There was a wide variation in the responses from school leaders as to the perceived quality of support and intervention from LAs and other partners. Equally, it was clear that some schools were more actively engaged in local partnerships than others. Some schools felt that they had an excellent relationship with their LA, with one leader praising their LA's 'remarkable leadership'. They said:

> 'The secondary heads meet regularly. The local authority's approach to violence crime supported by the school… [they have]… a "public health approach" to reducing violent crime that involves a) identifying the problem b) establishing the risks, protective factors and causes c) developing and evaluating interventions and scaling up policies and programmes and d) re-starting the cycle'.

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[40] 'Working together to safeguard children', DfE, 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2.
[41] 'Public spending on children: 2000 to 2020', Children's Commissioner/Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018; www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/public-spending-on-children.
[42] 'The response of London children's services to serious youth violence and knife crime', ALDCS, May 2018; www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/34040.

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76. Other school leaders in the sample we spoke to perceive that the quality of early help support from the LA is poor. Some reported that the availability of early help and support services for children and their families has reduced in recent years. Where it remained, some believed it was more difficult to access. As one headteacher said:

> 'early help needs to be much earlier [than secondary school], more effective and more intense'.

77. A few reported that LA referral thresholds for early help have become so high that the school is left to deal in isolation with serious concerns when, in the past, they would have had more support.

78. In line with the requirement to do so, many schools do much themselves to support children and their families at the early onset of problems, providing early help services. Some are targeting work at groups of pupils that they identify as being particularly vulnerable to criminal exploitation.

79. Some schools provide workshops for parents on drugs and on domestic violence. They work with a range of external providers to support parents. They also provide information to parents on the characteristics of pupils who are more likely to be drawn into criminal or unsafe behaviour. Many schools have also worked with Safer London, which they have valued.

80. However, despite leaders having very clear views about their ability to identify problem families and, consequently, the pupils who are most likely to be drawn into drug-related crime and knife crime, not all schools in our sample appeared to offer enough preventative work to the parents of potentially vulnerable pupils. As such, these schools were not using the detailed knowledge they had about pupils to inform preventative work. Some leaders were open to this as an observation during our visits, but some also reflected on the sensitivities of targeting support at vulnerable families in this way and the risk of being seen 'to label'.

81. 'Keeping children safe in education' states:

> 'Safeguarding incidents and/or behaviours can be associated with factors outside the school or college and/or can occur between children outside the school or college. All staff, but especially the designated safeguarding lead (and deputies) should be considering the context within which such incidents and/or behaviours occur. This is known as contextual safeguarding, which simply means assessments of children should

consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life that are a threat to their safety and/or welfare.[43]

82. However, schools and PRUs alone are unable to provide all the early help support that children and families need, nor should they be expected to. All schools need to be aware of the offer provided by LAs and wider partner agencies. Schools can contribute valuable information to assessing the needs and planning for children pre- and post-statutory social care or youth justice intervention. Schools and partner agencies need to continue to work hard to make sure this consistently happens.

Improving information-sharing

Recommendation 6: Schools and colleges should share full information with one another when pupils and learners move schools, pupil referral units or alternative provision or move to further education, to safeguard them and other pupils and learners.

Recommendation 7: Pan-London safeguarding partners should provide challenge to schools and colleges and, when necessary, drive improvement in how well schools and colleges share information with others to promote children's safety when those children move schools or begin further education, including via a managed move or when they are permanently excluded.

Recommendation 8: The Metropolitan Police Service needs to establish a clear and consistent protocol and memorandums of understanding with schools that ensure that it and schools routinely share information about children for the purposes of safeguarding.

Information-sharing between schools

83. 'Keeping children safe in education' states:

> 'Where children leave the school or college, the designated safeguarding lead should ensure their child protection file is transferred to the new school or college as soon as possible…'

and that

> 'the designated safeguarding lead should also consider if it would be appropriate to share any information with the new school or college in advance of a child leaving. For example, information that would allow the

[43] For further information on contextual safeguarding, see: 'What is contextual safeguarding?', the Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2018; www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/about/what-is-contextual-safeguarding.

new school or college to continue supporting victims of abuse and have that support in place for when the child arrives'.[44]

84. School leaders expressed concerns about being able to trust the information provided to them from other schools about a child, including when children transition from primary school, move between secondary schools, into PRUs and onto college. Information about children's safeguarding and wider welfare needs is not always complete or not received in good time. In particular, college leaders reported that they found it very difficult to get accurate and helpful information from secondary schools about pupils and learners progressing to college. Equally, school leaders also observed that it can be difficult to secure full-time education for a child, particularly when they are known to be affiliated to gangs or have been found carrying knives or drugs in the past.

85. College leaders believe that information on safeguarding matters, including information that they receive from schools, can be unreliable. This includes information on learners with child protection plans but also beyond this group to include looked after children, those in need and those who have targeted support through, for example, the youth offending service.

86. Some college leaders told us that they often have to rely on what students themselves choose to disclose about their personal circumstances. Typically, when a prospective student declares a conviction or other information that means they may need additional support, this is followed up by college staff with agencies such as the local youth offending services or children's social care. However, if a child makes no declaration, and the LA, previous school or the youth offending service does not inform the college then staff are not well placed to promptly and adequately secure the additional support that these students need.

87. Senior leaders in PRUs reported that information-sharing from schools about permanently excluded pupils was an area of concern for them. Although they receive information about the reasons for permanent exclusion, more detailed information about previous school history and the involvement of other agencies is not always received in a timely way. More generally, senior leaders stressed the importance of good information-sharing across agencies so that they can put in place measures to safeguard individual children, the wider cohort of children and inform curriculum planning.

88. School leaders also reported that there is no systematic way in which information is collected from secondary schools by the LA or police. Some schools were actively involved in discussions regarding those young people at the highest risk of gang involvement. Others had more limited knowledge and

[44] 'Keeping children safe in education', DfE, 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2.

were also unsure what information was held by their SSO. Schools often have a great deal of knowledge of the links between different pupils and families and could assist in assessing children who may be at risk of harm, but they did not always feel involved in discussions between partner agencies that would facilitate them sharing information for safeguarding purposes.

Information-sharing across partner agencies

89. Schools, including academies, have a responsibility to appropriately share information with partner agencies for the purposes of safeguarding children or preventing crime within the statutory guidelines. Although academies are not accountable to LAs in the same way as schools maintained by the LAs, they are required to share information with LAs for the purposes of safeguarding children and with the police to prevent crime.

90. Leaders recognised that that there are difficulties that would make it hard to devise a mechanism that would make information-sharing easier. That does mean, however, that they may not always be aware that youth offending teams are working with particular children or that they belong to the 'Troubled Families' programme. Some of this will be for reasons of consent. However, some schools and LAs appeared to be further ahead than others. One school had adopted a new electronic recording system (not seen) for safeguarding using specialist software. The school reported that this helped it build a holistic picture of the circumstances of pupils and includes information from the school and from other agencies such as information from children's social care, youth services and the SEND team. Leaders believe that this helps them keep pupils 'safe and well'.

91. School leaders have very different experiences of information-sharing with the police across different boroughs in London. Their experiences could generally be categorised under the following:

    - Schools had an SSO who was on site regularly throughout the week, who was embedded within the school, knew the children well and with whom information for the purposes of safeguarding was shared regularly. The SSO also shared information with the school, for example about any incidents from the night before that were relevant to the school and had safeguarding implications. This helped the staff to put in place any relevant safeguarding both for the individual pupil and the school.
    - If schools did not have an SSO full time, but on an ad-hoc basis, it seemed to depend on the relationship between senior school leaders and the individual SSO as to whether the relationship facilitated effective information-sharing.

92. In the case of knife crime, a child may have witnessed a traumatising incident the night before, or may know that a friend was hurt, or may themselves have hurt someone. It is important for the well-being of any children who have been harmed, or could be harmed, that school staff are aware of any incidents.

93. Some school leaders told us that the most effective agency they work with is the police. They value highly the presence at school of a local police officer. They also said although that now that this role is no longer ring-fenced, officers are not at the school as much as before and that, like all other services, the police are sometimes slower to respond to schools' needs than in the past.

94. As one principal said:

> 'We do not have a PCSO any longer. This role had a big impact on students, it is the uniform that makes all the difference. There was an incident in school with a craft knife and the PCSO had an input with the student. We do not have access to that anymore and dealing with these incidents internally does not have the same effect – this is a negative for us. The PCSO used to do assemblies but doing it ourselves does not have the same impact on the students'.

Teaching the curriculum

Recommendation 9: School leaders should consider how their personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) curriculum reflects local safeguarding issues and trends, including knife crime.

Recommendation 10: Pan-London bodies should consider ways in which they can support schools in ensuring that external organisations that are delivering anti-knife crime and gang affiliation sessions can provide a high-quality and impactful contribution to the school PHSE curriculum.

Recommendation 11: Safeguarding partnerships and school leaders should raise awareness of the dangers of grooming and criminal exploitation among both parents and children.

95. Many school and college leaders we spoke to were trying to educate children about the dangers of knife crime, and associated risks of grooming and exploitation. A few leaders identified tensions for them in delivering this work. For example, one commented:

> 'In an education market we are balancing the need to have a full school and deliver results. We don't want to be seen as a problem school where parents don't want to send their children… If you go too hard at it parents will question whether this is a problem school. We can go too far or not enough.'

96. Others were less concerned about how they were perceived and were transparent in their intention to deliver a curriculum that reflected what they saw as the realities of life outside of school for children and their families. One school leader said:

> 'Honesty is the key. The challenge is to not sweep it under the carpet. It will touch every school in London. There's pressure to get young people

through the door. We acknowledge it (youth violence) here. Parents and pupils appreciate it. We acknowledge that problems exist and deal with them. Parents want us to be honest and this builds a better relationship. If your job is to protect the reputation of the school, having students' backs will protect your school.'

In these settings, school leaders were considering how to plan curriculum activity that reflected local safeguarding issues and trends.

97. In a few instances, school leaders had identified groups of children whom they had concerns about, who were at increasing risk of exploitation and grooming. In line with the guidance in 'Working together', they were developing a bespoke set of activities aimed at these children. For example, one was working with a third-sector organisation to provide mentoring for a group of Year 10 boys who they had identified as at risk of gang involvement. Another targeted at-risk pupils in key stage 3 who attend after-school sessions to help them deal with conflict and manage their emotions. School leaders here report a reduction in fixed-term exclusions and improved behaviour in school for those children involved.

98. In the settings we visited, educating children about the dangers of knife crime formed part of their wider PSHE curriculum. A few schools candidly admitted that their curriculum was less well developed than they would like and that it was lagging behind young people's experiences. Others were struggling to identify external agencies with a proven track record with whom they could work. School leaders were keen to ensure that the curriculum content was age-appropriate.

99. There is a range of different ways that schools are educating children on the dangers of knife crime through the curriculum including, for example, through the delivery of core subjects, using case studies/facts about knife crime, using drama productions and supporting regional campaigns against knife-carrying, assemblies and tutorials. Within a well-thought-through approach to delivering the curriculum, any and all of these are valid methods to help children develop the knowledge and skills they need to keep themselves safe. There is little high-quality research on the effects of education programmes to prevent violence and knife crime among young people,[45] although some approaches have stronger evidence of success than others.[46]

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[45] 'European report on preventing violence and knife crime among young people', World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2010; www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/european-report-on-preventing-violence-and-knife-crime-among-young-people.

[46] 'Preventing youth violence and gang involvement: practical advice for schools and colleges', Home Office, 2013; www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-to-schools-and-colleges-on-gangs-and-youth-violence.

100. Some schools favoured using outside agencies to lead on the curriculum in this area and see these agencies as having greater credibility among young people, better knowledge of the subject area and, as a result, having more impact on children's learning. In one setting where ex-gang members delivered work, staff said:

> 'It was amazing to watch. They could discuss music, had similar backgrounds, used the same language as our students. It was a shock to students to find out that after prison, ex-gang members struggled to get a mortgage, a bank account and couldn't travel to America. They talked about when they were 16 and 17 and that it [joining a gang] seemed the coolest thing to do. It was a real eye opener for our students'.

101. School leaders are balancing the risks of engaging outside agencies against the costs associated with commissioning them and need assurances that what they pay for will be of good quality, appropriate for their children and effective. Leaders should be careful to monitor the activities to ensure they have the desired impact. Some school leaders voiced their concerns about the quality of externally commissioned work. As one said:

> 'you get a very different experience depending on who is delivering. Some sensationalise and don't set the tone we want. You just can't tell what the quality will be like. Some cannot relate outside of their own experiences. So, we worked with the police who focused on facts and the law. Students found this boring. They're not teachers. So now we are writing our own scheme of work because it needs to be taught properly.'

102. Research evidence suggests that there are benefits to interventions being delivered by people with direct experience with knife crime, but that it needs to be delivered sensitively. 'Scaring children straight' may in fact have negative effects and lead to more offending behaviour.[47] Evidence points towards the importance of those delivering interventions being experienced at working with young people.[48]

103. School leaders identified a range of mechanisms and ways in which they evaluate the effectiveness of their implementation of the curriculum. The most commonly cited way to judge effectiveness was through feedback gathered from children and staff. Other indicators of the quality of the delivery of the curriculum came from direct observations of teaching and learning. A number

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[47] 'Knife crime interventions: what works?', The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, 2013; www.sccjr.ac.uk/publications/knife-crime-interventions-what-works.

[48] 'Knife crime interventions: what works?', The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, 2013; www.sccjr.ac.uk/publications/knife-crime-interventions-what-works.
'What works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime: a rapid review of interventions delivered in the UK and abroad', Home Office/Early Intervention Foundation, 2015; www.eif.org.uk/report/what-works-to-prevent-gang-involvement-youth-violence-and-crime-a-rapid-review-of-interventions-delivered-in-the-uk-and-abroad.

of school leaders used GCSE results and the attendance, behaviour and exclusions of pupils as indicators that the curriculum was having a positive impact. These measures may be useful when tracking the impact of the curriculum on small groups of children who have been part of a bespoke curriculum but are less useful in making judgements on the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum more widely.

104. In a few settings, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum was underdeveloped and school leaders were unaware of the impact of the curriculum on pupils' ability to keep themselves safe. It is important that across the education sector interventions and initiatives such as these are properly researched and evaluated.

Working with parents

105. We saw a mixed picture as to how well parents are being engaged by schools and often a lack of work to educate parents about the dangers of gangs, knife crime and grooming. Schools should consider how well they are alerting parents to the dangers of knife crime, its causes and the preceding signs of exploitation.

106. In seeking to engage with parents, some schools have considered their approach well and are implementing their strategies effectively. For example, one school's parent engagement programme builds trust with parents through regular meetings that cover a range of relevant topics, such as drugs awareness, and inform parents of the support services that they can call on. These meetings help build a dialogue with parents and help build positive, trusting relationships between the school staff and the community.

107. Too often, though, a strategy to better engage parents had not been thought through by school leaders. Some school leaders adopt a 'don't want to alarm parents' approach because, in their view, they do not have a problem with knife crime in their area. This approach helps neither parents nor children. It is not conducive to a preventative approach that builds children's knowledge and skills so that they are well supported to keep themselves safe as they grow up in and travel around London.

108. A key aspect of strategic, multi-agency planning must include awareness-raising among both children and parents of the dangers and causes of knife crime. The parents in our focus group were unanimous in their call for policy-makers and local leaders to raise awareness among parents of grooming, gangs, child criminal exploitation and their links to knife crime for children. Parents described how they had been aware that their child was unhappy for some time and were attributing their increasingly challenging behaviour to parental divorce or, in one case, suspecting that their child was being sexually abused. None of the parents had considered that their children were being criminally exploited

because none of them had heard of county lines.[49] They all believed they would have been able to prevent their children perpetrating or becoming victims of knife crime if they had had more information about its causes and contexts.

Conclusion

109. In this report, we have made recommendations in an attempt to overcome some challenging issues. This is not a definitive list of answers – far from it. We recognise that this report contributes to an ongoing conversation and we hope that it brings more schools around the table to discuss and plan better ways of working together to protect young people. We have tried, whenever possible, to respect the different approaches taken by schools, particularly in regard to contested issues like exclusion and searches, but we have not backed away from calling out some of the consequences of some of the more extreme approaches taken.

110. While there are actions for schools, there is also the need for some coordination. London is complex, but it also has influential Pan-London bodies that can take a leading role in coordinating appropriate information-sharing and managing places for the most difficult children.

111. The Mayor of London has long spoken about an accreditation system for schools and colleges working to keep children safe from knife crime. We hope this report helps frame some of the requirements for such an accreditation and that schools see full engagement as a sign of strength and determination, rather than an admission of being a 'problem school'.

[49] 'Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery: an addendum', part of the 'Joint inspections of child sexual exploitation and missing children' collection, Ofsted, November 2018, www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-inspections-of-child-sexual-exploitation-and-missing-children.

Appendix 1 – The recommendations

Improving partnership working and strategic planning

Recommendation 1: Local community safety partnerships should fully involve schools, colleges and PRUs in developing and implementing local strategies that aim to address knife crime and serious youth violence.

Exclusions and managed moves

Recommendation 2: All schools and academies in London should ensure that their exclusion policy reflects the practice set out in the DfE's statutory guidance. Local authorities should have a strategic response to permanent exclusions. They should also, in conjunction with regional schools' commissioners , challenge schools and multi-academy trusts if exclusions do not appear to be in line with statutory guidance.

Recommendation 3: The Department for Education should collect data from schools about managed moves in the same way in which it collects information on permanent and fixed-term exclusions.

Early help and prevention

Recommendation 4: Safeguarding partners should involve school leaders at a strategic level in assessing the needs of children and young people in their area, and in planning and delivering early help services in response to those needs. Schools need to participate actively in local arrangements as required under 'Keeping children safe in education' statutory guidance.

Recommendation 5: Local safeguarding partnerships should facilitate all agencies including schools and colleges in challenging each other's practice if they believe any agency is failing to contribute to the local strategy to protect pupils from knife crime.

Improving information-sharing

Recommendation 6: Schools and colleges should share full information with one another when pupils and learners move schools, PRUs or alternative provision or move to further education, to safeguard them and other pupils and learners.

Recommendation 7: Pan-London safeguarding partners should provide challenge to schools and colleges and, when necessary, drive improvement in how well schools and colleges share information with others to promote children's safety when those children move schools or begin further education, including via a managed move or when they are permanently excluded.

Recommendation 8: The Metropolitan Police Service needs to establish a clear and consistent protocol and memorandums of understanding with schools that ensure that it and schools routinely share information about children for the purposes of safeguarding.

Teaching the curriculum

Recommendation 9: School leaders should consider how their personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) curriculum reflects local safeguarding issues and trends, including knife crime.

Recommendation 10: Pan-London bodies should consider ways in which they can support schools in ensuring that external organisations that are delivering anti-knife crime and gang affiliation sessions can provide a high-quality and impactful contribution to the school PHSE curriculum.

Recommendation 11: Safeguarding partnerships and school leaders should raise awareness of the dangers of grooming and criminal exploitation among both parents and children.

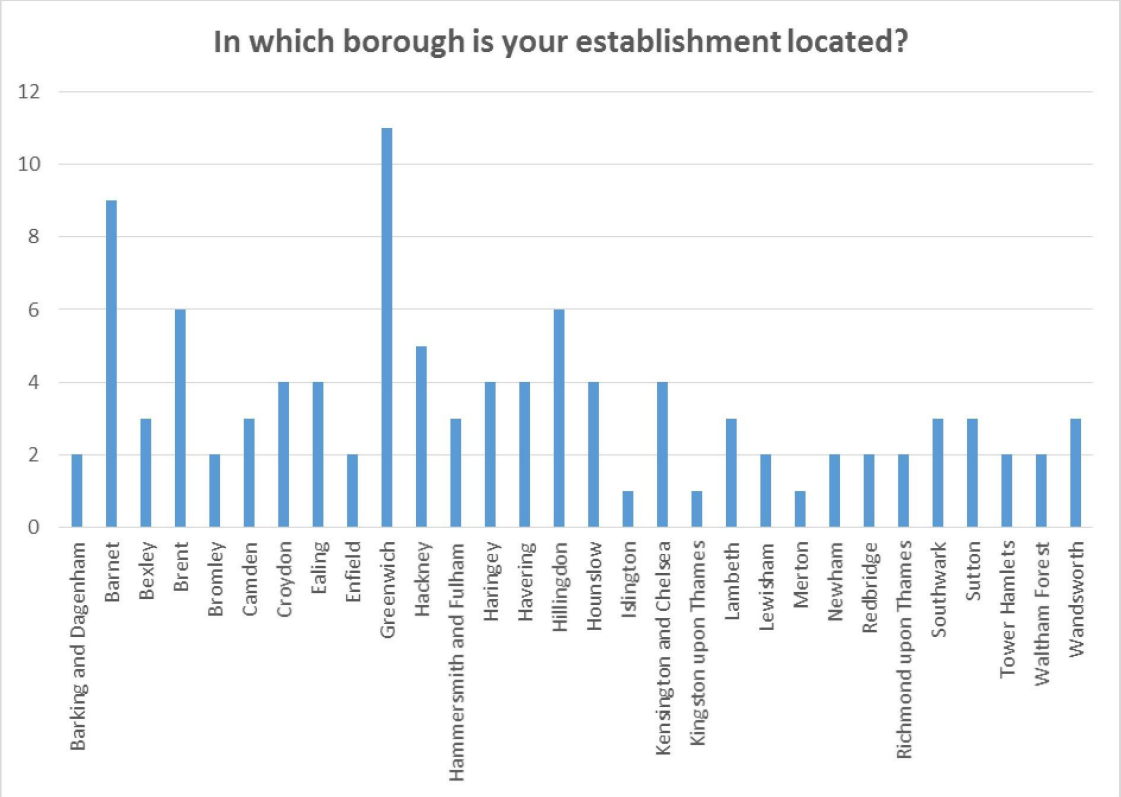
Appendix 2 – School survey

Introduction

Majority of responses were from headteachers but some were from other senior leaders.

Seventy-five per cent of responses were from secondary schools; the remainder were from further education colleges and pupil referral units.

The total number of respondents were 103 but not all participants answered every question.



Does your borough have a knife crime strategy?

Response	Number	%
I do not know	47	46%
No	10	10%
Yes	45	44%
Total	102	100%

What procedures for detecting knives does your setting have in place? (please select all that apply)

Response	Number of instances	%
Knife detection wands	56	55%
Knife arches	26	26%
Body scanners	4	4%
Stop and search	52	51%
Anonymous reporting procedures	59	58%
None	6	6%
Don't know	0	0%
Other	6	6%
Total	101	

Has your setting facilitated any work with children and young people about knife crime?

Response	Number	%
No	10	10%
Yes	93	90%
Total	103	100%

How does your setting teach children and young people about knife crime? (please select all that apply)

Response	Number of instances	%
As part of a subject syllabus	49	54%
During in-school enrichment activities	47	52%
In specialist workshops focused on knife crime	68	76%
During extracurricular activities and clubs	12	13%
Children and young people are not taught about knife crime at our setting	1	1%
Don't know	1	1%
My setting does not teach children and young people about knife crime	0	0%
Other	1	1%
Assemblies	23	26%
Total	90	

Which local partners does your setting work with about knife crime? (please select all that apply)

Response	Number of instances	%
Safer schools officers	81	90%
Local police officers	49	54%
Education welfare officers	19	21%
Local paramedics	7	8%
My setting does not work with any local partners about knife crime	1	1%
Other	24	27%
Total	90	

What support does your setting facilitate for children and young people affected by knife crime? (please select all that apply)

Response	Number of instances	%
Counselling	81	90%
Acceptable behaviour contracts	36	40%
Mediation of conflicts	44	49%
Family support	49	54%
Victim support	38	42%
Integrated offender management	5	6%
Peer mentoring	33	37%
The setting does not facilitate any support for children and young people affected by knife crime	1	1%
Don't know	2	2%
Other	21	23%
Total	90	

Total number of exclusions at your setting during 2016/17

Sum of fixed term	**3,258**
Average number of fixed-term exclusions per setting	**47.2**
Average number of fixed-term exclusions per school as a result of a knife incident	**0.8**
Sum of permanent	**181**
Average number of permanent exclusions per setting	**2.4**
Average number of permanent exclusions per setting as a result of a knife incident	**0.5**

Appendix 3 – Expert advisory panel

The Children's Society

The Difference

Red Thread

St Giles' Trust

Dr Carlene Firmin, University of Central Bedfordshire

Dr Fred Cram, Cardiff University

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Safer London

Two ex-gang workers

Missing People

SPACE

One paramedic



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