Witness Name: Kate Dixon

Exhibits: [KD2/01 – KD2/40]

Dated: 28 July 2026

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

SECOND CORPORATE WITNESS STATEMENT OF KATE DIXON

ON BEHALF OF

THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

1. I, Kate Dixon, will say as follows: -

2. This corporate witness statement on behalf of the Department for Education ("DfE", "the department" or "we") is made to assist the Southport Inquiry ("the Inquiry") with the matters set out in its request for evidence dated 24 June 2026, as addressed to the department ("the Rule 9 request"). I am authorised to provide this statement on behalf of the department. I and the department are committed to assisting the Inquiry in understanding and learning from the tragic events of Southport and are ready to provide any necessary support and information to aid this important process. I have prepared this statement with extensive support of current DfE officials, the Government Legal Department ("GLD") and Counsel. I have been reliant on them to identify and place before me copies of relevant documents. I previously provided a witness statement (Exhibit KD2/01 - DFE000256) dated 5 September 2025 to phase 1 of the Inquiry ("my first witness statement").

3. Since July 2016, I have been employed by the department as a director. I have had various roles, but since 2017 I have had responsibility for national policy on safeguarding in education settings including countering extremism. My current job title is Director of Strategy, Analysis and Safer Streets. I have been a civil servant since 2002.

4. I set out a summary of DfE's key responsibilities in my first witness statement. In respect of the relevant areas to this statement, DfE has overall responsibility for setting the policy, accountability and regulatory framework for children's services, including children's social care ("CSC") and for safeguarding in relation to children in education and training.

5. DfE works closely with other government departments to ensure a coordinated approach to policy affecting children and young people, particularly in areas such as family support, safeguarding, child protection, mental health and online safety. This includes work in relation to the Prevent duty, on which the Home Office ("HO") is the lead government department.

6. Violence fixated individuals ("VFIs") is a term used to define a newly identified threat. Although we are now using the term amongst policy officials in the department, there is not yet a clear definition or understanding of the behaviours that may identify this group. Therefore, current guidance, legislation and policy do not yet refer specifically to VFIs. This makes it difficult to respond to a number of the Inquiry's questions in detail, so I will seek in this statement to set out how the system currently works, what we are doing to adapt this and our thoughts on what more should be done.

7. Education and care professionals are, rightly, focused on providing high-quality education, safeguarding and care. The department does not expect them to assess the risk of a child committing a crime as part of their role. However, we do expect them to know how and when to report concerns around harm, both to and by a child or young person, as well as abuse and/or neglect when they see it. DfE provides the necessary guidance on how to do this, such as *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Exhibit KD2/02 - DFE000262 and *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (*"KCSIE"*) (Exhibit KD2/03 - DFE000263. I believe this system generally works well to protect children from harm.

8. This system could, however, be adapted to more effectively identify children who pose a risk of harm to others. Our sectors have a good instinct for spotting behaviours that indicate when something isn't quite right. With the right framework and training, education and care professionals would be able to play a key role in a system for identifying when a child may be at risk of causing harm to others, based on recognised behaviours that are established indicators of such a risk. As outlined below at paragraph 18, we are already consulting on how the statutory framework on help, support and protection for children and their families could be adapted to consider the risk of harm to others from children.

9. There is not currently enough clarity within education and children's social care about children fixated with violence and how to identify and tackle them. There is not a set of known interventions that are proven to work. As the Inquiry has recognised, there is not enough clear allocation of responsibility in this area. We consider that the policing and justice sectors are best placed to identify the behaviours that pose the risk, and then the education and CSC sectors can support identification of individuals at risk and contribute to intervention. We are already working with HO on this.

10. I agree with the Inquiry that information sharing needs to be improved and the department has taken important steps on this issue that I will set out later. We will of course continue to work with the Inquiry to support any further improvements that may be necessary.

11. The cohort in question extends beyond childhood into adulthood. Many of the sectors that come under the remit of the department, such as CSC, are not set up to engage with adults in this cohort.

12. There is a greater role here for a Prevent type system, a criminal or risk of criminality system with a justice or youth justice response. Education and childcare, CSC and out of school settings can support this work, but, because their core purposes do not align with a criminal and justice system response, they are not best placed to lead it.

IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING RISK

Identification of violence fixated individuals ("VFIs")

13. DfE expects education settings to remain vigilant to risks (including violence, harmful behaviour, and exposure to harmful online content). DfE sets the behaviour policies framework, exclusion rules and statutory procedures and safeguarding requirements linked with *KCSIE* (Exhibit KD2/03 - DFE000263). These define how schools must respond to violence, aggression and bullying, serious incidents that may require exclusion and preventative approaches such as positive behaviour strategies.

14. DfE recognises the term 'VFI' but does not currently employ it in guidance or policy work specifically. We know from our work on extreme misogyny that tackling the susceptibility to extreme views is key – and failure to do so can lead to views which can manifest in extreme religious, political, or gender-based ideologies. Our preventative approach aims to get upstream of the various manifestations of extremism. We do this by delivering support for teachers on core resilience building skills, and specific exemplar policies and resources.

15. Frontline staff in education settings are not well placed to identify VFIs on their own. They should receive training to enable them to recognise signs of risk and harm and are expected to use their professional judgment to involve other professionals appropriately, noting that there is currently no clear definition, description or framework for VFIs to which they can refer.

16. At present, DfE's *KCSIE* guidance (paragraph 49 of the Serious Violence section and then Annex B (Exhibit KD2/03 - DFE000263 , is clear that the Designated Safeguarding Lead ("DSL") should assess any risk to both the individual pupil and others in the school, considering wider information or concerns, and take appropriate action. Annex B of *KCSIE* also sets out that the DSL (and any deputies) should be aware of local procedures for making referrals to local authority children's social services and on Prevent referrals. Children's social care is still primarily about supporting the child, as set out in legislation, rather than considering the safety/risk to others. Settings are expected to prioritise early help such as pastoral support, behaviour support plans, referrals to counselling or mental health services or adjustments for unmet special education needs and disabilities ("SEND") rather than punishment alone.

Guidance, monitoring and assurance

17. DfE does not currently have any policy or guidance specifically around the identification, assessment or management of VFIs. Although no DfE guidance therefore directly refers to VFIs, I would refer the Inquiry to the relevant key guidance documents that DfE is responsible for drafting, publishing and disseminating, which were detailed at paragraph 66 of my first statement to the Inquiry (Exhibit KD2/01 - DFE000256), as well as the *Children's Social Care National Framework* (Exhibit KD2/04 - **DFE000264**). DfE guidance is subject to regular review, which includes consultation with stakeholders to identify what is working well and where it could be improved.

18. On 22 June 2026, DfE launched a consultation (Exhibit KD2/05 - **DFE000265**) on updating the statutory framework on help, support and protection for children and their families to inform revisions to *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026* (Exhibit KD2/02 - **DFE000262**) and the *Children's Social Care National Framework 2026* (Exhibit KD2/04 - **DFE000264**), policy that will underpin the development of Multi-Agency Child Protection Team regulations and wider policy development. Through this consultation, and in response to recommendation 39 of phase 1 of the Inquiry, we are aiming to understand how the statutory guidance can better support practice in identifying where children may pose a risk to others, including responding to potential extreme violence by children. Once a greater understanding of VFIs has been developed, including defining behaviours and effective interventions, then DfE will consider further whether the statutory framework should include specific reference to VFIs, or whether these types of complex harms would be better embedded within a broader approach to understanding harm, to support a more holistic response.

19. *KCSIE* (Exhibit KD2/03 - **DFE000263**) is the principal statutory safeguarding guidance that schools and colleges rely on every day to protect children and young people. It is updated regularly by the department to ensure it reflects the latest evidence, legislation and emerging risks. The most recent version was published on 7 July 2026 and comes into force on 1 September 2026 and includes a number of updates in response to the Inquiry's phase 1 report, which we have detailed in the government response to that report (Exhibit KD2/06 - **DFE000283**). It is distributed through the official government website and direct communication to education settings.

20. Schools and colleges are expected to ensure all staff read at least Part one of *KCSIE,* entitled 'Safeguarding Information for All Staff' (Exhibit KD2/03 - DFE000263). Guidance is reinforced through initial teacher training, continuous professional development and local authority briefings. Settings must translate guidance into safeguarding policies, behaviour policies and online safety policies. This includes appointing a DSL, setting reporting systems for concerns and creating procedures for serious incidents such as violence and weapons.

21. Ofsted inspection is the primary mechanism for monitoring compliance in state-funded schools. During inspections, inspectors assess pupils' behaviour and attitudes, the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and how well schools identify and manage risks, including those relating to violence and serious harm. Independent schools in England are subject to a different inspection regime from state-funded schools. Approximately half are inspected by Ofsted and half by the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

Training

22. DfE does not have any training focused on VFIs. However, the department has developed and delivered a suite of Prevent training for frontline professionals across the education sector known as the 'universal offer' (Exhibit KD2/07 - DFE000293). The universal offer is designed to support understanding and implementation of the Prevent duty and related safeguarding issues within education settings. While the training may cover behaviours, vulnerabilities and risks that are relevant to VFIs, its primary focus is on preventing radicalisation and supporting practitioners to identify and respond appropriately to concerns linked to radicalisation into terrorism.

23. DfE considers that further and/or different training is required on this issue. Safeguarding and behaviour training will need to evolve to ensure that staff working in schools, colleges and alternative provision are well placed to support the cross-agency framework that needs to be developed to address VFIs. Education staff need to be aware and be provided with tools, strategies and/or referral pathways that help them recognise the behaviours that could indicate a child is at risk of violence fixation.

Information sharing

24. There is a broad legislative framework for multi-agency information sharing already in place, which facilitates sharing information generally from birth to 18, and includes but is not limited to, risk posed by children who are VFIs. This includes the *Children Act 1989*

(Exhibit KD2/08 - DFE000266), *Adoption and Children Act 2002* (Exhibit KD2/09 - DFE000284) and *Children Act 2004* (Exhibit KD2/10 - DFE000286), the *Digital Economy Act 2017* (Exhibit KD2/11 - DFE000287), and data protection legislation. In addition, the *Human Rights Act 1998* (Exhibit KD2/12 - DFE000285) requires organisations to respect individuals' right to privacy while allowing information to be shared when it is lawful, necessary and proportionate, for example to protect a child.

25. Across DfE's draft statutory and current non-statutory guidance documents, there is a clear message that practitioners and agencies should share relevant information effectively, lawfully and without unnecessary delay to help, support, safeguard and protect children, including children who may be at risk from VFIs. The *Data (Use and Access) Act 2025* (Exhibit KD2/13 - DFE000288) was introduced by the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology, but we are not aware of any impact of this Act on information sharing arrangements for VFIs.

26. DfE is addressing long-standing information sharing challenges, including legislative, technological and cultural issues, through a coordinated programme of work to stop children falling through the cracks of services. This includes introducing:

    26.1. a new statutory information sharing duty (Exhibit KD2/14 - DFE000295), to apply from September 2026. This will be accompanied by new statutory guidance, including template data sharing agreements to be used locally, which will replace the existing non-statutory *Information Sharing Advice for Practitioner*s (Exhibit KD2/15 – DFE000111);

    26.2. a Single Unique Identifier to support improved identity management and data linking;

    26.3. information standards and a code of practice to improve the way data is stored, ensuring it can be shared more easily, and the Single Unique Identifier can be used effectively.

27. The information sharing duty has been introduced by section 4 of the *Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026* (Exhibit KD2/14 - DFE000295). This means there is a clear legal duty on relevant persons to share information with other relevant persons where it may support safeguarding and promote the welfare of children. This would include situations where a child may pose a risk to another child. Relevant persons include safeguarding practitioners and schools, subject to commencement and regulations. Consent (parental or otherwise) as a lawful basis for information sharing is not required under the duty.

Risk Assessment

28. There is not currently a specific process or agreed definition to support identification of a VFI, therefore education settings would not specifically risk assess this cohort. More broadly, where a pupil posed a risk of violence in an education setting, the setting would be expected to assess the risk to both the pupil and others in the setting but would not be responsible for assessing any risk to others outside of the setting. This is set out in DfE's *KCSIE guidance* (Exhibit KD2/03 - **DFE000263**).

29. Any future risk assessment tool would need to be carefully managed to be sensitive enough to pick up all true cases, but specific enough not to misidentify false positives. There is clearly a risk of harm of missing true cases, but there is also a risk of harm to young people who are falsely identified. Schools know their pupils very well, but there are others who are better placed, given the current limited understanding of VFIs, to use their specific expertise to assess and manage the risks of serious harm outside school settings. The more appropriate role of education staff would be to use their knowledge and insight to recognise identified behavioural features of VFIs and then refer these on for expert assessment.

SEND

30. Although not specifically designed for VFIs, Prevent resources for schools do include material on Autistic spectrum disorder ("ASD"), on the Educate Against Hate website (Exhibit KD2/16 - DFE000058). This material makes clear that concerns relating to children with ASD/SEND should be acted on as they would be for any other child. In September 2026, the department is extending the universal offer on Prevent to include training on SEND, which will make clear that SEND does not excuse behaviour, as well as reiterating that concerns about children with ASD/SEND should be acted upon.

31. DfE is also clear, across the more general guidance that it produces, that ASD should not excuse behaviour, nor should it prevent schools from referring their concerns or seeking additional support for a pupil with ASD or other SEND.

32. Any future guidance relating to VFIs should follow similar principles in respect of children with SEND.

Children not in school, young people not in education, employment or training and children receiving education otherwise than at school

33. The majority of this statement has focused on children and young people within education settings, or those known to CSC. We are very aware, however, that some

children and young people who may be at risk of becoming fixated with violence will not be attending mainstream education settings. This could include children educated in alternative provision, home education, NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) or with poor attendance. The department is working across each of these areas to try and ensure appropriate oversight, but it remains challenging. Any future policies relating to VFIs should include consideration of children not attending mainstream education settings.

THE ROLE OF THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

Monitoring, reporting, and responding to online harms within education settings

34. While an education setting can provide detailed information about specific pupils they may be concerned about and refer them to the appropriate service, DfE does not consider that education settings are, in general, best placed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which online disinhibition, anonymity, or harmful content platforms may directly contribute to the escalation of the risk of violence by children and young people. It is currently difficult to isolate the online habits of children and young people who are fixated with violence from others who do not become fixated.

35. For example, a Youth Endowment Fund ("YEF") report published in 2024 suggested that 70% of children encountered real-world violence on social media and 64% of those admitted it affected their behaviour (Exhibit KD2/17 - **DFE000268**). However, only a very small proportion of that number will become VFIs and on a quantitative level it would be extremely difficult to distinguish those children from others, particularly those with lower-level involvement in violence.

36. DfE already has robust systems in place to minimise the opportunities for children and young people to access harmful online content while they are on their school or college site or using school or college managed devices. Schools and colleges have a statutory responsibility to keep children and young people safe online as well as offline. DfE is clear in its *KCSIE* guidance (Exhibit KD2/03 - **DFE000263**), that governing bodies and proprietors should make sure their school or college has appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place, as detailed in the *Filtering and monitoring core standard* (Exhibit KD2/18 - **DFE000269**), part of the department's wider digital and technology standards. DfE published this core standard in 2023 (Exhibit KD2/18 - **DFE000269**) and is supporting schools to meet it through the *Plan technology for your school* service (Exhibit KD2/19 - **DFE000270**). We are consulting in the autumn about independent safety

certification of filtering and monitoring systems to ensure schools know which products align with the standards.

37. As part of the Lord Anderson review, DfE is working with HO to strengthen both the consistency and safeguarding application of filtering and monitoring software in schools (Exhibit KD2/20 - DFE000207). We recognise that many schools already use filtering and monitoring tools which generate alerts on harmful or extremist content; our work is focused on ensuring clearer national expectations for how these alerts are acted upon, including their regular consideration by DSLs and school leadership.

38. DfE has also published strengthened statutory *Mobile phones in schools guidance* (Exhibit KD2/21 - **DFE000271**), which states that all schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default. The guidance is clear that the department expects schools to implement a policy whereby pupils do not have access to their mobile phone throughout the school day including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.

39. Ofsted evaluates how schools meet their safeguarding obligations as set out in the *KCSIE* guidance (Exhibit KD2/03 - **DFE000263**), including how schools protect children from online harms whilst on school devices. On inspection, Ofsted will ask about a school's filtering and monitoring systems. Additionally, ensuring that schools have completed an annual check of filtering and monitoring systems will form part of Ofsted's inspections from September 2027.

40. DfE is increasing support to the sector by expanding the risks addressed through the Educate Against Hate Explainer series (Exhibit KD2/22 - **DFE000272**). The department is also sharing best practice through national webinars with the YEF and providing schools with EPIC, a free self-assessment tool based on evidence of what prevents youth violence (Exhibit KD2/23 - **DFE000294**).

Internet use outside of education settings

41. A key barrier for education settings in responding to online harms, however, is the reality that children and young people are only attending schools and colleges for a proportion of their waking hours.

42. The government launched a call for evidence which closed in June 2026, to gather research on how screen use affects children aged 5–16 (Exhibit KD2/24 - **DFE000292**). This will inform new, practical, evidence-based guidance resources for parents to be published in autumn 2026.

43. An independent expert group, co-chaired by the Children's Commissioner and the former DfE chief scientific advisor, Professor Russell Viner, will review the evidence and develop recommendations. This guidance will focus on what safe and developmentally appropriate screen use looks like, helping parents make informed decisions about screen use outside of school hours.

44. The department's statutory *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education* guidance (Exhibit KD2/25 - **DFE000289**) sets out in its "Wellbeing online" sections, the content to be covered by the end of primary and secondary school, and that schools' health and wellbeing curriculum should include "*the benefits of limiting time spent online, the risks of excessive time spent on electronic devices and the impact of positive and negative content online on their own and others' mental and physical wellbeing*".

45. The government has said that 16 and 17-year-olds will be encouraged to observe a midnight to 6 a.m. social media curfew (Exhibit KD2/26 - **DFE000273**). Related powers have been set out in Section 70 of the *Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026* (Exhibit KD2/27 - **DFE000267**) and the government has announced that secondary legislation will be brought forward to prevent children under 16 having access to social media (KD2/28 - **DFE000274**).

Identifying concerning patterns of online behaviour in education settings and sharing information about concerning patterns of online behaviour

46. DfE's *Filtering and monitoring core standard* (Exhibit KD2/18 - **DFE000269**) sets out that all staff should conduct a level of in-person monitoring if they are in a room with students on devices, as part of wider classroom supervision. A monitoring plan should be in place, and this should include how students will be monitored by staff when using school-managed devices connected to the internet. DfE's *Filtering and monitoring core standard* also states that settings should ensure that technologies and techniques that allow users to get around filtering, such as VPNs, proxy services and end-to-end encryption methods, should be blocked either at a system level or by the internet service provider. As a minimum, the monitoring plan should include weekly monitoring reports highlighting incidents. This would include attempted access to VPNs and other techniques to evade filtering. It should also include immediate reports when an incident is classed as high-risk – for example, those of a malicious, technical or safeguarding nature.

47. As set out in paragraph 27 above, section 4 of the *Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026* (Exhibit KD2/14 - **DFE000295**) introduces a clear legal duty on safeguarding practitioners to share information with other relevant safeguarding agencies including in

cases where children may show concerning online behaviour and where they may pose a risk to others.

Restricting or monitoring access to the internet as a way to reduce the risk posed by VFIs and potential VFIs

48. As stated in the *Filtering and monitoring core standard* (Exhibit KD2/18 - DFE000269), schools and colleges should consider how their students' risk profile could inform their approach to filtering and monitoring, considering things such as their age, if they have SEND and whether they have English as an additional language. Different levels of access could also be configured according to different student risk profiles.

49. DfE is not aware of evidence that social media alone causes children and young people to become fixated with violence. However, as set out above, the YEF has published a report (Exhibit KD2/17 - DFE000268) containing evidence that shows that exposure to violent content online is common and can contribute to risk when combined with other factors such as vulnerability, social influences, and exposure to extremist ideologies.

50. The Inquiry asks what DfE's understanding is of the gaps or limitations in the protections currently afforded by the *Online Safety Act 2023* (referred to as the Online Safety Act 2025 in the Inquiry's Rule 9) (Exhibit KD2/29 - DFE000275). Queries on the effectiveness of the Act would be more effectively directed at Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport who are responsible for the policy and Ofcom, as the regulator for the Act. It is, however, worth noting that schools and colleges are exempt from the *Online Safety Act 2023* (Exhibit KD2/29 - DFE000275) as they are already under duties and responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children through *KCSIE* (Exhibit KD2/03 - DFE000263).

KNIVES AND BLADED ARTICLES

51. DfE's approach to preventing serious violence is focused on acting early to reduce children's vulnerability to violence, strengthen schools' ability to identify and respond to risks, and improve the wider system of support around children. Our work combines universal prevention for all pupils with targeted support for those most at risk, and is part of the government's mission to reduce youth violence, which DfE is contributing to alongside HO and the Ministry of Justice.

52. Firstly, we are strengthening schools' violence prevention response. Schools are uniquely placed to help prevent violence because they provide safe, consistent environments where children build trusted relationships, develop social and emotional skills, and access support when concerns emerge. Our focus is on ensuring that schools have the

confidence, capability and evidence they need to identify vulnerability early and take effective preventative action.

53. We are also improving access to evidence and practical support through a new Preventing and Responding to Violence guidance hub, which the government intends to launch in the new 2026/2027 school year, and a programme of work delivered with the Youth Endowment Fund. This will include webinars, evidence summaries and practical tools that help schools adopt approaches shown to reduce children's vulnerability to violence.

54. For schools facing the greatest challenges, the new cross-government Safety in and Around Schools Partnership ("SIASP") (Exhibit KD2/30 - **DFE000290**) programme will provide targeted support to around 250 schools in areas most affected by knife crime during school commuting hours, helping schools understand local risks and strengthening their response alongside local partners. SIASP is helping schools work more effectively with local partners in areas affected by knife crime.

55. We are strengthening place-based prevention in the wider serious violence system by embedding learning from Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed ("SAFE") Taskforces (Exhibit KD2/31 - **DFE000291**), which were school-led partnerships established in serious violence hotspots to bring schools together with local partners, to identify and support children at risk of serious violence through evidence-informed interventions.

56. In addition, we are strengthening the protective factors that reduce children's vulnerability to violence. Evidence shows that children who are engaged in education, have positive relationships, attend regularly, feel a sense of belonging and can access enriching opportunities are less vulnerable to involvement in violence. We are therefore embedding violence-prevention considerations across wider education reforms rather than treating serious violence as a standalone issue.

57. We are also improving partnerships and system interactions around schools. Preventing violence requires coordinated action across education, safeguarding, policing, health and community services. We are therefore working to improve information sharing, strengthen local partnerships and ensure schools can access timely support for children at risk via SIASP and SAFE Taskforces.

Searching, screening and confiscation of prohibited items within education settings

58. DfE provides *Searching, Screening and Confiscation* advice (Exhibit KD2/32 - DFE000116) for schools and colleges. This gives staff information about when they can search for prohibited items and what constitutes a prohibited item.

59. The guidance includes advice on:

    59.1. The role of the headteacher, the DSL and authorised members of staff in carrying out searches,

    59.2. Screening and the use of walk-through or hand-held metal detectors (arches or wands),

    59.3. Confiscation and what to do with items that have been confiscated.

60. If a pupil is found to be in possession of a prohibited item, the guidance sets out that staff members should alert the DSL (or deputy) and the pupil should be sanctioned in line with the school's behaviour policy to ensure consistency of approach. DfE's *KCSIE* guidance (Exhibit KD2/03 - **DFE000263**) sets out the steps the DSL should take in these circumstances, as well as how they should work with other agencies. The DSL should assess the risk to both the individual pupil and others in the school, considering wider information or concerns, and take appropriate action. Depending on the risk, they should put in place a safety and support plan, and where relevant, consider action to de-escalate peer conflict.

61. As set out in DfE's *Suspension and permanent exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement* guidance (Exhibit KD2/33 - DFE000134), the government trusts headteachers to use their professional judgement, based on the individual circumstances of each case, when considering whether to suspend or permanently exclude a pupil as a result of them bringing an offensive weapon or prohibited item into school.

Monitoring the prevalence of weapons being brought to school by students

62. DfE does not hold data on the number of students found to possess knives or bladed articles at schools in England. Searching, screening and confiscating knives or bladed articles are operational matters managed at school level and are not part of statutory data returns to the department.

63. Local police forces are responsible for responding to and reporting on violent crime, including in education settings. HO has responsibility for collating police recorded crime data from the police forces of England and Wales. This includes offences using knives and sharp implements. Open data tables for police recorded crime, which underpin the data released by the Office for National Statistics, are available on gov.uk (Exhibit KD2/34 - **DFE000276**):

DfE data sources

64. The department monitors a range of other data related to children's risk of violence.

School and College Panel survey

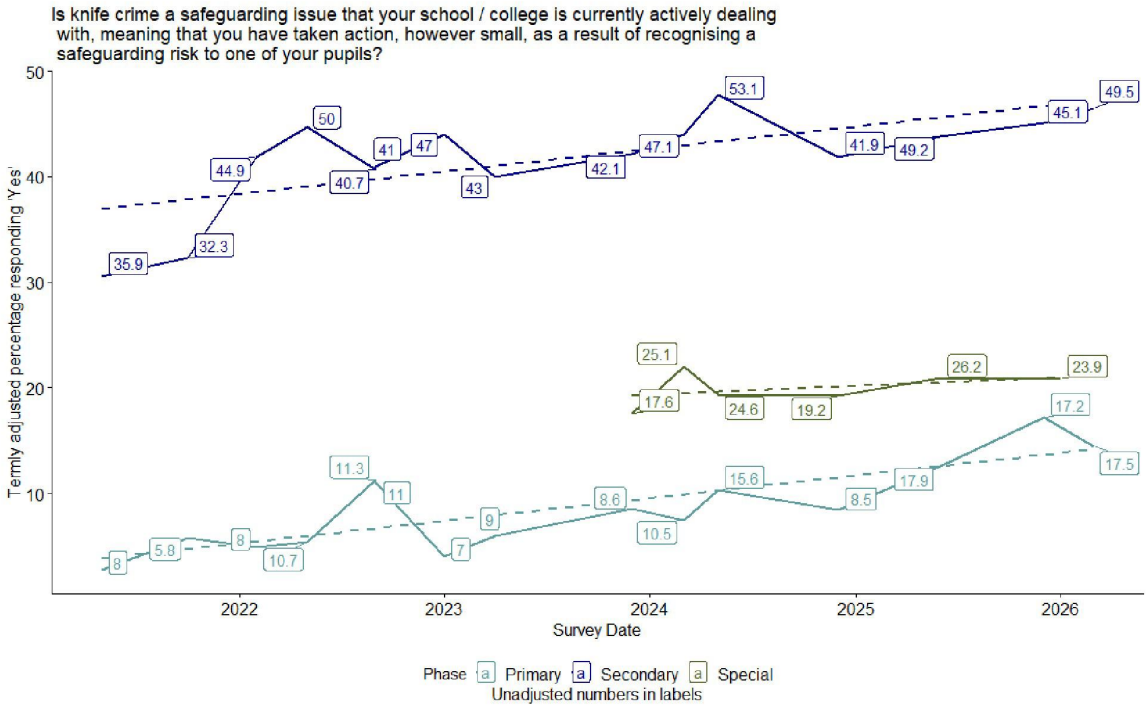
65. DfE's monthly *School and College Panel survey* (Exhibit KD2/35 - **DFE000277**), sent out to teachers and leaders who are randomly selected and then agree to take part, has since February 2022 regularly contained questions about knife crime as a safeguarding issue. The March 2024 version of this survey contained a specific question about any known incidents of weapon possession by a pupil on school premises since January 2024 (Exhibit KD2/36 - **DFE000278**). 27% of the secondary school leaders who responded to the survey said that there had been a known incident of weapon possession by a pupil on school premises since the beginning of the year.

66. The following table shows percentages of school leaders who responded affirmatively to the question on whether their school is currently actively dealing with knife crime as a safeguarding issue, when it was included in the survey:

Survey date	Primary	Secondary	Special
Jun-25	18%	49%	26%
Dec-24	8%	42%	19%
May-24	16%	53%	25%
Mar-24	11%	47%	25%
Dec-23	9%	42%	18%
Apr-23	9%	43%	
Jan-23	7%	47%	
Sep-22	11%	41%	
May-22	10%	51%	
Feb-22	8%	48%	

67. While this does not present any obvious trend, we have observed that there is a seasonal variation in responses, with leaders approximately 3% more likely to report knife crime is a safeguarding issue in spring term, and 5% more likely in summer term, when compared to surveys in autumn term. It is not clear whether this represents a genuine increase in perceived threat, or if leaders are reporting actions begun, but possibly not concluded, in autumn term if asked in spring or summer.

68. Once this seasonal effect is adjusted for, as shown in the charts below, the overall trend is much clearer:



Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England

69. The department collects national data on suspensions and permanent exclusions from state-funded schools through the school census collection. As a part of this collection, schools provide information on the reason for each suspension or permanent exclusion from a descriptor list. This is then published with two terms in arrears in the termly *Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England* data release (Exhibit KD2/37 - **DFE000279**).

70. This provides a partial picture of knife-related incidents in schools, but only where the incident has resulted in a suspension or permanent exclusion and therefore does not capture all cases of possession. Schools can select the following weapons-related reason from the descriptor list for the suspension or permanent exclusion of a pupil:

    70.1. Use or threat of use of an offensive weapon or prohibited item - carrying or bringing onto the school site an offensive weapon or prohibited item such as knives, sharp instruments and BB guns; carrying any article that has been or is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage to property; use of an offensive weapon.

71. This national collection does not capture every incident of weapon possession in schools. For example, where a school identifies a knife or other prohibited item but manages the incident without a suspension or permanent exclusion, that incident would not be recorded through the national school exclusions data collection. Searching, screening and confiscation are operational matters managed at school level, and the department's guidance is clear that schools are expected to maintain appropriate local records and use them to inform safeguarding and behaviour management.

72. The numbers of pupils suspended or permanently excluded under the reason "Use or threat of use of an offensive weapon or prohibited item" shows a similar trend to the chart above, with an increase across all school phases since 2021/22. Notably, in the academic year 2024/25 numbers of suspensions/permanent exclusions for this reason continued to increase despite a drop in overall numbers of suspensions and permanent exclusions.

	State-funded primary		**State-funded secondary**		**Special**	
	Suspended	**Permanently Excluded**	**Suspended**	**Permanently Excluded**	**Suspended**	**Permanently Excluded**
2021/22	1138	45	11708	498	324	6
2022/23	1277	80	12566	600	446	6
2023/24	1392	93	12968	602	407	8
2024/25	1,489	105	13,258	647	561	14

73. The department is working to improve the monitoring and oversight of school exclusions data. From September 2026, a new and updated reasons descriptor list will be available in the school census. This list will enable schools, when they record incidents that have led to suspension or permanent exclusion, to distinguish between a pupil having threatened to use or used a weapon or prohibited item in school and where a child has been found to have brought the item into school but not used it. Together, these new categories should provide a broader national picture of incidents involving prohibited items and weapons that result in an exclusion.

Schools' response to knife crime in schools report

74. DfE commissioned a company called Verian to conduct qualitative research with school leaders to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which schools identify and respond

to serious violence and knife crime. The resulting report was published in September 2025 (Exhibit KD2/38 - **DFE000280**). The report included details of:

74.1. Schools' perception of knife crime

74.2. What schools did to prevent knife crime

74.3. How schools responded to knife crime

74.4. How schools implemented knife crime policy and practice

74.5. Further support for schools.

75. The findings from this report have directly informed DfE's approach to supporting schools on serious violence prevention. In particular, the research highlighted that schools found the existing landscape of guidance and support fragmented and difficult to navigate, and identified a need for clearer, more accessible and better coordinated support.

Education, children's social care and offending: local authority level dashboard

76. This dashboard allows local areas to understand factors in their area which result in vulnerability to crime and comparisons with their nearest statistical neighbours (Exhibit KD2/39 - **DFE000281**).

Ministry of Justice Report: Patterns of education, social care and youth offending: Education and social care background

77. The Ministry of Justice published the *Patterns of education, social care and youth offending: Education and social care background* report (Exhibit KD2/40 - **DFE000282**) in May 2026, part of a suite of reports giving insights into the education and social care background of children and young people who have been cautioned or sentenced for any offence, with a focus on knife offences, anti-social behaviour and acquisitive offences, and violence against women and girls offences.

FUTURE POLICY THOUGHTS

78. At present, there isn't a clear system for responding specifically to children fixated with violence in the main areas the department is responsible for: education, childcare and CSC. However, there are at a local level, including through schools and local authorities, effective systems in place for noticing and responding to harms more broadly, including referring them to other agencies.

79. The department is playing an active part in cross-government work to develop a better understanding of the VFI cohort and is grateful for the work of the Inquiry in advancing this.

Our view is that increasing this understanding involves researching how to identify the key behaviours of this cohort (which may be more useful than developing a rigid definition), identifying the interventions that work to prevent them from harming others, and ensuring that the system works better to support this cohort and prevent them from harming others, alongside clarity on where responsibility lies.

80. Any response will also need to consider that VFIs can be children as well as adults and therefore how it will manage the response to both these age groups, and the transition between them. Lessons, for example from Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements ("MAPPA"), have shown that structures that are primarily adult-focussed do not usually serve children well. Conversely, the department's work with schools and CSC is focused on children and not designed to respond to adults. This poses a challenge that will need to be carefully considered.

81. As the Inquiry has noted, the CSC system is set up to respond to children who are experiencing harm. Some of these children also cause harm because of the abuse they are facing. While we know there are children being supported through the CSC system who have been groomed into harming others, we do not know whether there is a relationship between this group and those who are, or go on to become, violence fixated.

82. I also understand that the Inquiry is considering whether Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs ("MASHs") could provide a potential structure to lead and own work on VFIs at the local level. I would caution against this approach. MASHs are intended to act as a multi-agency forum for screening and coordinating referrals into CSC. They have important limitations. Firstly, they are not a statutory function and do not exist in every local authority; where they do exist, their form and role vary. Secondly, they aren't set up to deal with adults, and finally MASHs are not generally case-holding bodies and do not themselves own risk, responsibility or accountability for what happens after triage.

83. The critical issue relating to VFIs is what happens after triage: who assesses the risk in detail, who takes on responsibility for the case, and what interventions are put in place. MASHs are not able, in themselves, to solve the core issues of identification, ownership, responsibility or knowing what to do next.

84. Schools and colleges play an important role in working as part of multi-agency arrangements to support and help manage young people who are VFIs that attend their setting. However, individual schools are likely to have infrequent exposure to such pupils, therefore schools and colleges throughout the sector are unlikely to have the skills and experience to co-ordinate multi-agency management of VFIs.

85. While the evidence and knowledge base on VFI identification and intervention is developing it is hard to determine who might be best placed to lead this work. The lead agency will need to respond to child and adult VFIs and be used to assessing and managing risks to others. On this basis, we would suggest exploring the role of Prevent or a Prevent type body, or the criminal justice system in taking on this role, with the support of CSC and education settings.

Statement of Truth

86. I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: **SIGNATURE**

Dated: 28/07/2026