INTERVENING EARLY TO PREVENT GANG AND YOUTH VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Foreword

Our 2015 report on the risk factors for gang involvement and youth violence showed that risk factors can be identified in children as young as seven. There is a clear opportunity to intervene earlier than we do currently on a key issue affecting outcomes for children, and primary schools have an important role to play here. The reality, starkly illustrated in this report, is that these opportunities are being missed.

This is not a criticism of primary school teachers, whose voices are front and centre in this new report. Our analysis paints a picture of passionate, caring and committed professionals, deeply concerned about the risks facing their pupils but at a loss as to how best to support them, and feeling thwarted by the thresholds for social care or CAMHS involvement. Primary schools are poorly integrated with wider services and early help arrangements. They do bring external providers in to work with their pupils, but their decisions about who, what and when are rarely informed by evidence of what works, and the impact of this provision is seldom evaluated.

There is no easy solution to the problems of gang involvement and youth violence, but we do know that primary schools offer a critical opportunity to intervene early at a time when a real difference can be made to outcomes for vulnerable children and their families. None of this is easy in a time of chronic budget restrictions and retrenchment back to core statutory responsibilities. None of it is easy when schools, even at primary level, are pushed to focus almost exclusively on academic attainment. But the schools we spoke to are 'intervening early' anyway, in spite of these challenges. Not doing so just isn't an option. It's imperative therefore that we, collectively, give them the tools they need to do this in an evidence-led way, fully supported by and engaged in wider local early help structures.

We are grateful to the Battersea Power Station Foundation for their continued support for our work, and to the London boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth and the participating schools for their enthusiastic involvement in this project.

Dr Jo Casebourne

Chief Executive,
Early Intervention Foundation

Summary

The debate about what drives young people to become involved in gangs and to perpetrate or become victims of serious youth violence or exploitation is seldom out of the headlines. Knife crime and serious youth violence is increasing, and is of significant concern, particularly in London. Countless politicians, senior police officers and community leaders have talked the talk of early intervention, and yet opportunities to work with vulnerable children to increase their resilience to gang involvement are still being missed.

As part of a portfolio of work conducted in 2015, EIF published a report on the risk and protective factors for later involvement in gang and youth violence.[1] The report identified a range of predictors of gang involvement and youth violence in primary school-aged children, as well as protective factors which reduce the likelihood of youth violence and gang involvement. Alongside this, EIF published a rapid review of interventions which assessed what works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime.[2] Taken together, these reports have helped to answer important questions about how and when we can identify signals of risk in children, as well as which types of interventions appear to work in preventing them from staying or becoming involved in gangs and youth violence.

Now, this project provides an opportunity for us to explore the extent to which young children at risk of gang involvement or youth violence are supported through evidence-based early intervention, particularly within primary schools. This report draws on qualitative interviews with schools, local government officials, police and voluntary sector organisations within the London boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth. It is the first output of a three-year project that will explore and support the testing of evidence-informed approaches to early intervention to prevent gang involvement and youth violence.

Findings

Views on the impact of gang and youth violence on primary school children

Some teachers and school staff were very concerned about the direct impact of gang and youth violence on their pupils. Others recognised gang activity as an issue in the local area but one that was not having an immediate impact on the school. Some of the participating schools clearly saw gang and youth violence as a problem that they had to deal with, whereas others saw it as a peripheral problem rather than a priority.

The providers we spoke to recognised that awareness within schools varied, and felt that teachers needed more training about the signs and implications of gang involvement. Participants did express a view that the average age of involvement in gangs was falling, and that early intervention with primary school-age children was crucial.

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1   See 'Review of risk and protective factors' at: http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence/

2   See 'A rapid review of interventions' at: http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence/

Other risks facing primary school pupils in deprived areas

There was deep, shared concern about the broader set of risks facing pupils. Teachers talked about doing everything they could to support vulnerable children while they were in school, but felt frustrated and saddened that this was not always enough to prevent children going down the wrong path. There was a general consensus that children in these schools needed a higher level of pastoral care. Pupils were described as struggling with emotional literacy, dealing with conflict, or self esteem.

Identifying vulnerable children

Confidence of school staff in their ability to spot the early signs of risk varied. Some school staff felt that they knew their pupils and families well enough to be able to do this, while others said that they needed more training and a better understanding of gang and youth violence. This latter view was echoed by the voluntary sector providers we spoke to.

Processes within schools for raising concerns about children who may be at risk of gang involvement were disparate. Some were very informal, others more rigorous.

Relationships with services beyond the school gates also varied widely. There was a lack of clarity about the referral pathways for primary school-age children who might be displaying early risk factors, but who fell below the thresholds for statutory services. Schools called for stronger links with local authorities and the police.

Supporting vulnerable children

The same disparity existed in the way these children were supported in school. Some schools aimed to support them with a wide range of interventions, including those offered by external providers as well as specialist staff, but others were heavily dependent on one member of staff, such as a learning mentor to deliver support.

It was also evident that some schools were very unclear about what services were available to them – either statutory or otherwise. Some schools had recently reduced their use of external providers due to budget reductions, and noted this as a lamentable loss. Where external providers had been brought in to deliver support to pupils, they were often selected on the back of informal recommendations, and commissioning of such services was rarely evidence-based.

Policy implications

Overall, our interviews painted a picture of primary school staff who knew their children and families well, and who went above and beyond to try to provide strong, positive role models and to support children's emotional wellbeing. However, there was also a strong sense that some school staff were intensely frustrated and felt unsupported in their efforts to work with vulnerable children. Some staff expressed anger and sadness as they told us that they felt unable to change children's outcomes in spite of their best efforts.

These messages chime with our understanding of the challenges of implementing effective early intervention, and particularly with our work looking at social and emotional learning in schools. Primary school is a critical setting for supporting children who are at risk of gang involvement, youth violence and other poor outcomes, and schools need to be enabled to work effectively within the wider system to fulfil their early intervention responsibilities effectively.

Our research raised a set of four key issues in particular.

1. There is a gap between what the evidence tells us works and what is actually being delivered in schools.

Decisions about which programmes to bring into the school to support children are not driven by the evidence base or careful matching of programmes to needs, and these programmes are rarely evaluated.

- There is an urgent need for accessible messages for schools and others working locally about the evidence base: what has been shown to work, and for whom.
- Central government, police and crime commissioners and other funders have an important role to play, and should ensure that they make funding decisions based on the evidence of what works to prevent gang and youth violence.

2. There is a need to support social and emotional learning in schools.

We know that schools-based programmes designed to foster children's social and emotional skills, implemented carefully within the right 'whole-school' environment, can have an impact on later involvement in crime and violence, as well as upstream indicators like aggression, mental health problems and substance misuse.[3] Our work has shown that these are among the best-evidenced approaches to preventing involvement in gangs and violence.

- Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) should be compulsory in all schools, with dedicated time and a curriculum that reflects the current evidence base. It is also critical that the new Ofsted common inspection framework includes specific consideration of how effectively schools are supporting the development of social and emotional skills.
- There is a need to implement high-quality social and emotional learning programmes within the context of a whole-school approach. We need to support schools in moving away from piecemeal, fragmented and reactionary approaches to particular challenges facing their pupils and towards a social-ecological model that acknowledges the influence of peers, school, parents, families and the community.

3. Primary schools are poorly integrated into wider early help arrangements.

Schools need to understand their role in the wider system and the expectations of them, to be confident that they can refer children who do not meet statutory thresholds for social care or CAMHS intervention, and that those children and their families will receive support. In-school support for vulnerable children needs to be coordinated with wider support for the family.

- At a time when many local authorities are seeking to find efficiencies though integrating their children's and youth support services with those of partner agencies, we need to better understand the most promising ways of doing this. Further work should be done to explore ways in which schools can be linked into wider early help arrangements.

4. Relationships between local police and primary schools vary considerably.

These relationships range from police officers regularly delivering sessions to children through to very little contact. We are not aware of any robust evidence for the impact of any of these approaches. Local policing resources are increasingly

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3   For an introduction, see: http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/introduction-to-social-and-emotional-learning-in-schools/

stretched, and it is essential that they are used in the most productive ways to support policing objectives, schools and the wider early help infrastructure.

- Further work should be done to look in more detail at the nature of these relationships across the country, and in testing the impact of some of these arrangements, to inform police force decisions about the allocation and role of neighbourhood officers or police community support officers (PCSOs) in relation to primary schools.

Next steps for this project

This research is the first output of a three-year project. We will be working with the local authorities, police, participating schools and providers in Lambeth and Wandsworth over the next two years, with a view to co-designing, implementing and testing new approaches to preventing gang and youth violence through effective early intervention.

1. Introduction

The problem of gang involvement and youth violence

Knife crime and youth violence is on the rise across the country, and is a particular concern for London. In 2016, London accounted for around three in 10 recorded knife offences nationally. In 2016/17, London experienced a 24% increase in knife crime offences, representing 2,332 more crimes than reported in 2015/16. London has also seen a 23.8% increase in gun crime – specifically discharges of potentially lethal weapons – since 2012.

Knife crime and serious youth violence are crimes that affect young, black men disproportionately in London. Analysis of Metropolitan Police data for 2016/17, for the Mayor's Knife Crime Strategy, shows that around 75 per cent of victims of knife crime were male, and most of them were under 25 years of age. Almost half of all victims of knife crime were from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. Almost 90 per cent of offenders were male, and of those 62 per cent were from BAME backgrounds. There were 57 fatal stabbings in London in 2016/17, seven of which were related to domestic abuse. Almost half of all victims of non-domestic knife homicide were black males aged between 15 and 24.[4]

It is notoriously difficult to say how much of this serious youth violence is gang-related, but we know that gang involvement means that young people are more likely to carry knives.[5] We also know that some of the pernicious impacts of gang activity are harder to spot in the statistics. For example, gang activity is known to be linked to peer-on-peer exploitation and abuse. The 'county lines' phenomenon, a national issue involving the use of mobile phone 'lines' by criminals to expand their drug-dealing businesses into new areas, is perhaps the clearest example of this. This sees vulnerable children exploited and coerced into selling drugs in rural or coastal towns.[6] Gang association can also have devastating consequences for girls and young women, including serious sexual abuse.[7]

Early intervention and prevention

The 2011 cross-government report, *Ending Gang and Youth Violence,* set the stage for subsequent strategies at local, regional and national level by placing early intervention and prevention – the 'public health model' – front and centre.[8] It recognised the critical fact that some risk factors are present from birth, and others manifest early on.

EIF's 2015 review of the literature on risk found that strongly predictive risk factors could be seen in children as young as seven, namely 'troublesome' behaviour, offending, substance use, aggression, running away, truancy, having a disrupted family, and having friends who were frequently in trouble. The most strongly

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4   Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime [MOPAC] (2017) *London Knife Crime Strategy*: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_knife_crime_strategy_june_2017.pdf

5   McVie 2010, as quoted in MOPAC 2017.

6   National Crime Agency (2017) *County Lines Violence, Exploitation and Drug Supply 2017*: http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/832-county-lines-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2017/file

7   Centre for Social Justice and XLP (2014) *Girls and Gangs*: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/girls-and-gangs

8   HM Government (2011) *Ending Gang and Youth Violence*: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-and-youth-violence-cross-government-report

evidenced protective factors (we were not able to break these down by age group) were good family management, stable family structure, infrequent parent–child conflict, positive/pro-social attitudes, belief in the moral order, low impulsivity, academic achievement, and low economic deprivation.[9]

We also carried out a rapid review of the international literature on effective and ineffective approaches to preventing gang involvement and youth violence or associated problems, including youth offending, conduct disorder, aggression, and association with deviant or gang-involved peers. Our review concluded that skills-based programmes delivered in schools (particularly for at-risk children) and family-focused programmes such as home visiting, parenting support and family therapy, had the strongest evidence of impact on outcomes relating to gang involvement or youth violence.[10]

The aims of our current research

EIF's 2015 review of risk factors suggested that primary schools are key settings for early intervention to prevent gang and youth violence. In fact, many of the risk factors identified in the literature are based on teacher reports.

Our review of effective programmes also points to the importance of primary school, with skills-based social and emotional learning programmes delivered in schools showing some of the strongest evidence of impact on outcomes relating to gang involvement and youth violence.

Now, our current research seeks to explore the role that primary schools are playing in supporting children at risk of gang involvement or of becoming perpetrators or victims of serious youth violence, the challenges that they are facing in doing this, and the opportunities for improvement. This report is the first output from a three-year project focused on the London boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth. It is based on qualitative research that took place with staff in schools within the two boroughs, as well as a range of relevant stakeholders and providers delivering services designed to help prevent gang and youth violence.

Over the next two years we will be working closely with primary schools in the two local authorities, with the police, with key local authority staff, and with voluntary and community-sector organisations to support and test evidence-based approaches to early intervention to prevent gang involvement in the two boroughs, and to generate learning which can inform London-wide and national approaches.

Overview of the two boroughs

Crime and demographics

This project is focused on the London boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth, in south London.[11]

Lambeth is one of London's most high-crime boroughs, ranked third after Westminster, with a total of 34,855 notifiable offences in the past 12 months.[12] In

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9   See 'Overview report' at: http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence/

10   See 'A rapid review of interventions' at: http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence/

11   These two boroughs are of particular interest to the Battersea Power Station Foundation, which is funding a wider programme of work on tackling gang involvement and youth violence in the area.

12   See: https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/crime-dashboard. Figures as at 2 March 2018.

spite of this, Lambeth has seen a reduction in the number of gang-related offences over the past five years, falling by nearly 25% from 101 to 76. However, in common with the rest of London, the number of knife crimes with injury involving under-25s and the number of victims of serious youth violence have increased dramatically since 2012/13, with increases of 10.6% and 39.6% respectively.[13]

The 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation places Lambeth as the eighth most deprived borough in London.[14] Children and young people under the age of 20 make up 21.2% of the borough's population, and 85.6% of school children are from a minority ethnic group. The level of child poverty is worse than the England average, with 27.3% of children aged under 16 years living in poverty.[15]

Crime in Wandsworth is significantly lower than in Lambeth, with a total of 25,574 notifiable offences in the past 12 months. From October 2012 to 2013, there were 75 gang-related offences in Wandsworth, and by the same period last year the number had decreased by 65.7% to a total number of 28 reported offences. However, the number of knife crimes with injury involving under-25s and the number of victims of serious youth violence in Wandsworth have increased dramatically since 2012/13, with increases of 41.7% and 75.7% respectively.[16]

The 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation places Wandsworth 22nd out of 32 London boroughs.[17] Children and young people under the age of 20 years make up 20.9% of the population, and 73.6% of school children are from a minority ethnic group. The level of child poverty is similar to the England average, with 20.3% of children aged under 16 years living in poverty.[18]

Partnership context

Both boroughs are committed to working preventatively with children and young people at risk of gang involvement to ensure that they get the right support at the earliest opportunity, and are supportive of our project.

Our project is also timely for both councils. Lambeth is beginning the process of recommissioning a gangs prevention programme and reconsidering its youth violence strategy. Wandsworth is in the process of developing a new early help offer, moving to a 'single front door' model for referral into an early help hub, which is expected to significantly improve the experience that schools have in contacting the local authority for support.

Terminology

It was striking that these two boroughs use different language in this area. While Wandsworth local authority staff use the term 'gang' or 'gang involvement', Lambeth staff are more comfortable with talking about 'youth violence', because of the stereotypes that the term 'gang' can evoke. There were differences between

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13 https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/crime%20/gangs-dashboard

14 Leeser R (2016) *English Indices of Deprivation 2015*, briefing 2016-01, GLA Intelligence: https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/indices-of-deprivation-2015

15 PHE Child Health Profile, Lambeth, March 2017: https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile-group/child-health/profile/child-health-overview/area-search-results/E12000007?search_type=list-child-areas&place_name=London

16 https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/crime%20/gangs-dashboard

17 Leeser 2016.

18 PHE Child Health Profile, Wandsworth, March 2017: https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile-group/child-health/profile/child-health-overview/area-search-results/E12000007?search_type=list-child-areas&place_name=London

individual schools too: some comfortably used 'gangs' with us and with their pupils, while others said that they actively steered clear of the term.

> **'We don't talk about anything to do with gangs with the children, and we are quite clear about that. ... There have been things in the past where people have had to talk about it quite a lot, but now we don't mention gang because they have different connotations and ideas about it.'**
> **School staff**

There was recognition across the board that 'gang' can be a very loaded and difficult term, but also acceptance from some quarters that it is an established label and that there would be limited benefit to changing it. Stakeholders also reflected on the relatively narrow definitions that are used by the police, and the fact that only certain activities feature on the Metropolitan Police 'gang matrix', which flags individuals known to be involved in gang activity. These definitional nuances obviously have an impact on the statistics and what is considered to be a gang-related crime, youth violence, knife crime, and so on.

For the purposes of this research, we were interested in any violent or gang behaviour and did not seek to categorise the different examples that we came across in line with any existing definitions. With research participants and throughout this report we have chosen to use the term 'gang and youth violence', since this is a comprehensive way of ensuring that all relevant behaviour is captured.

Research objectives

The focus on this qualitative strand of the project was to explore what currently happens at primary school level to identify and manage risk around gang and youth violence. The specific objectives for the study were:

- To understand the current response to early risk factors for gang involvement in primary school-age children in Wandsworth and Lambeth.
- To explore the extent to which children at risk of gang involvement are routinely identified in Wandsworth and Lambeth primary schools.
- To understand the current risk identification and referral processes, related to the risk of gang involvement, that have been initiated in Wandsworth and Lambeth primary schools.
- To understand the nature and availability of the support currently offered to primary school-age children identified as vulnerable to gang involvement in Wandsworth and Lambeth.
- To explore the views of teachers, local authority representatives, voluntary and community-sector service providers and the police about what is working well and what could be improved in terms of early intervention to prevent gang involvement.

Methodology

This report summarises the data emerging from a qualitative strand of work. Qualitative research is an ideal methodology to employ when views, attitudes and experiences are being sought, because the data collection allows for in-depth exploration and unpacking of participants' responses. A total of 28 in-depth interviews (either face-to-face or via telephone) were carried out between June and November 2017 with school staff across six schools and stakeholders within the two boroughs, as well as with providers and those working in services or interventions relating to gang and youth violence. Three schools were selected

from each borough using a purposive sampling strategy coupled with input from the two local authorities. A full explanation of the methodology and approach used can be found in the appendix to this report.

Direct quotes from the interviews are used throughout this report. In the interests of anonymity, we have not sought to draw out differences between the two boroughs. While the overarching approach of each local authority differs slightly, our research indicates that both views and challenges in relation to preventing gang and youth violence span the two authorities, and that differences in schools are as likely to occur within the two boroughs as between them.

2. Levels of concern about gang and youth violence

While gang and youth violence was clearly a priority for both councils, school staff fell into two groups when asked about the prevalence and impact of gang and youth violence on their school.

The first group knew that gang and youth violence was an issue in the local area but didn't see it as an immediate issue for the school. Staff in this group recognised violence as a community issue but hadn't witnessed it or seen the impact personally. They relied on news sources, friends and colleagues to keep them informed about events. They described feeling as though their school was located within a safe bubble and, while they knew that activity was happening on their doorstep, didn't consider there to be an immediate impact on the school or its pupils. This group of staff reflected on the fact that some of the children in their school might be affected later in their schooling, and mentioned how they sometimes heard from parents about how siblings had been in trouble, but they didn't see it as an immediate concern. Some staff within this group questioned whether they should perhaps do more to learn about the issues in order to understand the risk to their school's pupils.

There was a stakeholder view that some schools may not want to fully admit the extent of the problem because they are nervous about how it will reflect on them, despite the fact violence generally never takes place within schools themselves. This was not something that we picked up on in our research, although there is likely to be an element of self-selection, since all schools who took part did so knowing what would be covered and so by definition were happy to talk about gang and youth violence. Those who were less concerned by the issues did not seem to be denying they existed: they either didn't know much about the problem or considered it to have little impact on their particular school.

For the second group, gang and youth violence was front of mind and seen as an immediate issue for the area and school. Staff in this group felt that gang and youth violence was a really pressing problem. They spoke about instances of gang and youth violence taking place in the community and involving current and former school pupils. These staff tended to live close to the school and understood the local area and the challenges it faced. Many had worked in the school for some time and knew of many former pupils who had been either the victims or perpetrators of violence in secondary school and beyond. Some staff in this group were quite emotional when they spoke about the challenges that their school faced and their fears for their pupils. Although they could often identify those children who were at greatest risk from very early on, and did everything they could to support them while they were in the school, they felt frustrated and saddened that it often wasn't enough.

Some of the schools we visited were closer to highly affected areas than others. However, the location of the school does not provide a full explanation for the diversity of views among the staff we interviewed since, in some cases, views differed considerably within individual schools. There was also a correlation between staff knowledge of the area and their views: those who lived close to the schools and the areas in which gang and youth violence was more prevalent saw it as being more of an issue for the school than those who lived further away or had been at the school for less time.

The providers we spoke to were very clear about the prevalence of gangs in the areas that they work in and about the impact that they can have on primary school-age children. The providers recognised that schools have highly variable awareness of the issues and felt that education of teachers on the nature and risk factors for gang involvement was as important as education for pupils on the risks of gang involvement. They were able to provide numerous examples of instances where they had delivered events which resulted in teachers realising the extent of pupils' knowledge or involvement in gangs, having previously thought that it was not an issue.

The extent to which gang and youth violence was seen as an issue by school staff understandably influenced the degree to which it was considered to be a priority for schools and individual staff members. While some of the schools clearly saw gang and youth violence as something that they had to work with and had integrated their response to the issue into the school's culture and ethos, others recognised it as a more peripheral problem which wasn't front of mind on a daily basis. However, staff highlighted to us that many children in their schools needed a high level of pastoral care. They described pupils struggling with emotional literacy, finding conflict especially challenging, having low self-esteem, or being especially clingy or needy.

> **'They fall out with each other, they don't have a way to make it up so they'll shout over. Some things that you think are quite small can become a big issue and they don't have the skills to deal with things when they go wrong.'**
> **School staff**

There were teachers who had worked in other schools previously who spoke about their current school as having a higher proportion of pupils with high levels of social and emotional needs, which was seen as challenging. Teachers who had previously worked in schools with less-diverse pupil populations and fewer pupils requiring that level of support pointed to the benefits of having such a mixture of cultures and needs within the school, and felt that that these acted as drivers for stronger pastoral care and more open engagement with parents.

When asked which children are currently being affected by, or drawn into, gang and youth violence, participants expressed a view that the average age of involvement was falling. A Lambeth stakeholder informed us that the borough has younger offenders than other areas of London. Across the schools, some felt that that children became vulnerable to these issues in years 5 or 6, and many staff felt that it started considerably earlier than that.

> **'I would say that from reception/year 1, I could tell you who is going to go down that path. And it starts showing itself around year 3/4. By year 5, if you can't knock it on the head, then that's it.'**
> **School staff**

Stakeholders pointed out that while the age at which young people generally commit serious offences within or outside a gang is typically 14–20-years-old, the age at which they start to become involved or show signs of being at risk is much earlier. One of the providers we interviewed told us about how they had adapted their programme to focus on younger children in response to a growing number of requests from schools who were concerned about younger pupils being at risk.

When asked whether it was boys or girls who got involved in gang and youth violence, there was a very mixed response. One view held that it is predominantly boys who get involved. However, the staff who thought this tended to either, by

their own admission, have less knowledge about gang and youth violence, or saw gang and youth violence as being less of a priority for their school.

On the other hand, staff who saw gang and youth violence as an immediate issue, stakeholders and providers spoke about the problem as something affecting both genders, although not necessarily in the same way. It was acknowledged that while girls could be pulled into gangs, they can sometimes have different or more peripheral roles, such as being used as a 'gift' to male gang members, or for carrying weapons or drugs, as they are less likely to be suspected by police. Girls' involvement may therefore be less obvious or harder to track. Stakeholders also spoke about how the definitions used for the police gang matrix can mean that girls often don't appear on it, which may lead to a partial picture of what is happening.

Some stakeholders and providers spoke about how they are targeting girls specifically because they are often overlooked, with one provider indicating that they are starting to deliver their workshops in all-girls schools in an effort to dissipate some of the myths around girls' involvement in gangs.

However, while girls' roles were acknowledged, one stakeholder suggested that girls don't have such a strong presence in gangs in Wandsworth as in other areas of London:

> **'There certainly are girls on the periphery, certainly in terms of sexual exploitation. We do get occasions of girls carrying knives on behalf of gangs' members and less often carrying drugs. But in terms of the problem of girls in gangs it is limited in Wandsworth – it's not as prevalent as in other boroughs that I know of.'**
>
> **Stakeholder**

We did not particularly probe the question of the ethnicity of children or young people involved in gangs, but it is notable that, aside from one provider's mention of a stereotype of gang members as young black boys, this was not spontaneously mentioned very much by participants.

3. Perceptions of the impact of gang and youth violence on pupils

Unsurprisingly, school staff who felt that gang and youth violence was less prevalent in their area reported that it had a lower impact on their school. However, some degree of impact was reported across all the schools, and four key ways in which the issue has an impact on primary schools and their pupils were identified.

Siblings and other family members being involved in gangs: Participants spoke about older siblings as having a huge influence on primary school-age pupils. Having an older sibling in or connected with a gang was seen as one of the most direct ways for a child to become involved. Although siblings were the most common route, other family members such as cousins and uncles were also mentioned as a strong influence. Participants also shared knowledge about how primary school-age children may be groomed by gang members (who are often relatives) so that they can be recruited to gangs later. The children may be given gifts, for example, and singled out or treated well over a number of years, so that gang members can ask favours of them when they are older and feel beholden.

Siblings, family members or former pupils as victims or perpetrators of violent crimes: While primary school-age children themselves were not often involved in gang and youth violence, their siblings or other family members sometimes were. School staff spoke about incidents that had happened in the recent past where siblings of pupils were either the victims or perpetrators of violent crimes. These incidents could have a huge effect, not just on those directly related to the crime, but also on the wider school population. Where former pupils were involved in incidents, this had a huge impact on school staff, many of whom had been at the school for years and so had worked with children who were later killed, injured or sentenced. The staff most affected were those who identified gang and youth violence as being both prevalent and a priority. They were often very emotional as they described feeling powerless to divert the path that they could see these children taking from a very early age.

Siblings taking younger children out with them: School and provider staff spoke about primary school-age children being taken out in the evenings by older siblings. These siblings may or may not themselves be in gangs, but by taking the younger children out on the estates at night or putting them in other inappropriate or illegal situations, it was felt that that they were exposing them to things they shouldn't see or know about. One teacher spoke about an incident where an older brother dropped his sibling off at school having shoplifted at a supermarket on the way there, in full sight of the younger child. The older sibling left the younger with instructions to behave at school, having openly modelled illegal behaviour. While not necessarily common, these sorts of incidents were seen as having a direct effect on pupils at school, and staff reported how they could identify who was exposed to things beyond their years through the language they used and their attitude towards teachers and other staff.

> '**We had a girl year-before-last where her older sister was a part of a gang, so she'd be out late on the road with her sister. Her older sister was 16 and she was in year 6, so the way she spoke, sometimes like things would happen where we'd have to do proper investigations. Cos they're so exposed, when she goes with her older sister, she'd end up doing things with boys … we have to call in parents, do a CP form … it does really affect children. Even the little ones … we can hear the way they speak, the dialect, the words that they use, it's not age-appropriate … we have to pull them up on it at times.'**
>
> School staff

Crime taking place locally: Several schools spoke about the impact that local crimes can have even if there are no direct family links with the incident. Staff indicated that children are now more aware of what happens through social media, and can sometimes be quite upset or scared by what they hear.

Beyond these explicit ways in which schools were affected by gang and youth violence, school staff spoke about the general exposure that their pupils could have to violence and gang behaviour simply by living in the area. Some staff admitted that they had no idea just how much exposure their pupils had until they brought an external provider in to run a gang-focused workshop with the children. These staff spoke about their surprise at just how much pupils knew about local gangs, what the gangs did and the language that they used. This led staff to feel that, while primary school-age pupils may not be directly involved in gang and youth violence, the seeds for later involvement are certainly sown during the primary years.

Schools faced challenges in addressing these issues openly and honestly with the children, particularly given their young age. Staff felt torn between preparing them for the challenges of secondary school and keeping them in the 'cocoon' that primary school represents. Each school approached this in a different way: some chose to tackle the issues head-on while others avoided the subject if possible. Nevertheless, they shared a consistent need to manage the level of detail that the pupils were exposed to and consider whether to address issues in classes or small groups or across the school.

There were also notable differences between schools in the amount that these issues were discussed within the staff body. For some it was clearly a daily or weekly discussion, and staff in these circumstances relied heavily on each other for emotional support to navigate the difficult repercussions. In other schools it was far more peripheral, and while they spoke regularly about the risks to vulnerable children more generally, the language of gang and youth violence was rarely used.

4. Views on the causes of gang and youth violence

Although participants were not explicitly questioned on their views of the causes of gang and youth violence or of children becoming involved in gangs, some views emerged spontaneously during our interviews.

The schools we visited were situated in areas where many families suffer multiple deprivation, which was seen by one group of participants as one of the key factors in children being vulnerable to gang and youth violence and other issues. School staff reflected on how children in their schools were victims of circumstance, and expressed concern about many of the children in their care, some of whom they knew to be living in crowded conditions, often sharing a room with many siblings.

Parents were described as being under an enormous amount of stress and therefore not able to keep track of their children, who were often out in the local estates until late at night. Staff observed that, rather than being deliberately neglectful, parents were often playing out their own upbringing or lacked the necessary parenting skills. Schools described how they often struggle with some parents who are unwilling to engage with them, and this lack of engagement was partly attributed to parents having had bad experiences during their own schooling, and thus little trust in the system. Often the children of these parents were considered to be the ones most in need of help, and schools found it hardest to give these children the support they needed.

> **'It's just sad, but I think it's got a lot to do with the parents. Thinking about the most recent cases, we've tried to work [with the parents]. It's the ones where the parents are not willing to work with you, no matter what you do, what you say.'**
>
> **School staff**

A lack of a supportive family and clear role models were also considered to be some of the primary drivers for risky behaviour. There was a view that without the consistent attention of a parent or other adult, children could lack the necessary social skills or focus to thrive. But while some felt that the causes of gang and youth violence lay within more vulnerable families, others cautioned against stereotyping when it came to defining the causes of gang and youth violence.

> **'Maybe the schools that are on estates tend to have more disadvantaged young people, but disadvantage does not necessarily mean neglect, and I feel we have to be very very careful with this.'**
>
> **Stakeholder**

Children who had additional needs including physical or mental health issues or special educational needs were also seen as potentially being more vulnerable and easy to exploit, especially where these characteristics were combined with issues at home or a lack of a stable environment.

Although some school staff felt able to reflect on the potential causes of gang and youth violence, others admitted that they had no clear sense of what the causes might be, or what made children vulnerable to it, and indicated that they would need more training on the nature and structure of gangs to understand what made children susceptible.

5. Identifying vulnerable children

Understanding risk factors

One of the objectives of our research was to understand how effectively the risk of gang and youth violence is being identified within primary schools. School staff were therefore asked to reflect on what they felt the risk indicators were, and the extent to which there was a shared understanding or formal process for working with these within their schools.

While there were no formal lists of indicators currently being used within the schools, comparisons were made between the risk indicators for child sexual exploitation (CSE) and gang and youth violence. Some schools felt that the now-widespread understanding of CSE indicators had heightened their knowledge of risk factors in general, and assisted them in understanding which children might be vulnerable to gang and youth violence. Stakeholders also suggested that an understanding of CSE indicators had heightened general awareness of what to look for. The point was also made that these risks are often co-dependent, so that a child identified as being at risk of CSE is also more likely to be at risk of gang and youth violence.

School staff also credited their identification of indicators to their personal knowledge of pupils and their families and circumstances. Across the schools, staff stressed the importance of getting to know children, especially those considered vulnerable in some way, and prided themselves on having an understanding of their pupils' wider situation. They felt that this allowed them to identify possible areas of risk early on. By getting to know children and their families well, staff felt they were more easily able to spot even slight differences in behaviour, language or attitude, and to know when something seemingly quite innocent – like a child wearing an expensive new pair of trainers – might actually be a cause for concern.

One school had previously attempted to pull together a formal list of risk indicators for gang and youth violence but had struggled to know how to go about it without relying on stereotypes. They ended up abandoning the exercise in favour of relying on staff members' personal knowledge of the children. There was, however, some appetite across schools for more information and support on risk identification. School staff spoke about having had relatively little training in this area, beyond what occurred in their standard safeguarding and Prevent duty[19] teacher training modules. For some staff, this lack of training was not seen as an issue because they felt confident in their understanding of the issues and risks and their personal knowledge of families. Others admitted to feeling unsure – 'a little at sea' – when it came to understanding the risks. It was clear in some cases that, although vulnerability and risk in general were monitored, staff had not specifically thought about what they should look for in relation to gang and youth violence before.

19   The duty to safeguard vulnerable children from being radicalised into supporting terrorism or becoming terrorists themselves.

'I think that we've got a very strong safeguarding presence, not so much with the gang focus. At least, not from my experience. We've got a very strong safeguarding presence for things like children who are at risk for many different things – anything from neglect, to violence, to sexual exploitation. As for identifying children who are necessarily vulnerable for gang membership, you could probably put the entire school into that bracket … I would say, with the exception of maybe a handful of kids in each cohort, in each year group, I would say the large majority of them are at risk for joining one type of gang or another.'

School staff

Providers gave examples of how teachers often have no idea about the level of knowledge about or involvement in gangs that pupils can have. Children may not be exhibiting any of the classic indicators, or teachers may not know what to look for. One provider that runs workshops to warn children about the dangers of gangs spoke about how children will sometimes divulge their knowledge of or peripheral involvement in gangs during a workshop, and that this will come as a complete surprise to school staff. These sorts of workshops are therefore designed to educate teachers as much as children, and were considered by providers to be a really useful way of getting knowledge to school staff about what to look for.

Stakeholders pointed out that there is a tool for identifying sexual exploitation that schools can use with the child to help them identify whether they're at risk, but that there isn't currently anything similar in terms of early intervention in relation to gangs and youth violence. It was felt that an equivalent tool could be helpful. While the indicators for early involvement in gangs are known, local authorities aren't currently having conversations about them with schools and families in the way that they are about CSE.

Process for raising concerns about risk in schools

Each school has its own individual policy for staff to follow when they are concerned about a pupil. This usually involves the staff member who has identified a risk completing a form and passing it to the safeguarding lead or a member of the senior leadership team. Some schools described a relatively informal process that was designed to respond to the individual needs of the child. Others had more formal processes, which they considered to be quite robust. These generally involved multiple steps and meetings with a range of key staff and sometimes external specialists, such as a member of the CAMHS team or a family support worker. The individual approach was party determined by the size of the school: smaller schools often had more informal processes because staff tend to know all the children well and may themselves hold multiple roles within the school.

What was very notable, however, was the diversity in approaches to escalating concerns beyond the school walls. Stakeholders commented that they had no idea what the process might be for schools to refer concerns about early signs of risk for gang and youth violence, and that at present there are no clear referral pathways for gang and youth violence, and so the route taken is very much up to the individual school. Schools echoed this, and some staff we spoke to admitted to being unclear about whether the route they generally took was the right one, and whether there were other options open to them.

Providers mentioned that they will often flag children who they have identified as showing early signs of risk when working at a school. However, they were

concerned that these referrals were not always followed up by schools and reported to the local authority in the way that they should be, and that children at risk were therefore falling through the net. The fact that schools felt that there was no clear point of contact within local authorities for these issues and no clear referral pathway may account for this in part. This point is explored in more detail in chapter 7.

6. Supporting vulnerable children

The diversity of schools' current approaches to supporting vulnerable children is striking. While some school staff described how they drew on a wide range of internal and external staff (including educational psychologists, social workers, therapists) and specific interventions, others relied almost entirely on just one or two members of internal staff. Many of the schools we spoke to were frequently trying new approaches to get the best support possible with limited resources.

Schools were heavily reliant on personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) to deliver much of this support, and some schools felt they had a very good PSHE programme. However, many staff and providers indicated that they felt that the current curriculum does not give PSHE enough emphasis, and schools were therefore making up the shortfall in their own way.

Some of the schools we spoke to had implemented programmes that EIF has concluded are evidence-based. One example is PATHS, which is aimed at promoting social and emotional competencies in preschool and school-age children, while simultaneously facilitating the educational process in the classroom. PATHS is a multi-year prevention programme, designed to be used by educators and counsellors in group settings within schools, to facilitate the students' development of self-control, emotional awareness, and interpersonal problem-solving skills.

Other schools we spoke to had chosen to use their budget to bring in specialist support staff, such as art or play therapists. Some had brought in external providers such as Place2Be, a charity working in schools to support and improve the emotional wellbeing of pupils, families, and school staff.

Many schools had also set up internal support networks of some sort for the most vulnerable children. This might include small groups working outside the classroom, or a mentor scheme where staff are assigned individual children. In some cases, one or more learning mentors were the primary way in which schools provided additional support. Learning mentors were seen as vital in providing one-to-one help for those children considered vulnerable or at risk and were seen by many schools as 'worth their weight in gold' (school staff).

One view was that the most important strategy for supporting vulnerable children was to provide an open and nurturing environment. This was especially the case in the smaller schools, where they prided themselves on having a family feel. Staff spoke about the importance of having an open-door policy for children and families, and of doing everything they could to make pupils feel safe and supported. Several schools were proud of the fact that pupils (including those they considered most at risk) would regularly return to visit the school once they had started at secondary school, and they saw this as evidence of what a safe haven the school provided. Those schools who saw gangs as a priority issue were concerned that some of their pupil population were not safe when they left the school walls, and so did everything they could to keep children at school as long as possible during the day. They provided free or heavily subsidised afterschool clubs or ran sports clubs aimed at those children they felt needed additional focus or a hobby to keep their time occupied.

> **'I think sometimes it's about the longer we can keep them, the safer we think they are. We run a play scheme in the summer, so we'd offer that as well to keep them off the streets … We do our best – but then again, you know, come 3.30 when they get picked up we have no control about what they do after that. There should be more outside. There should be.'**
>
> **School staff**

One of the strongest themes that emerged in relation to the support provided for vulnerable children is just how reliant on individual staff schools can be, and therefore how fragile many of their support systems are. Schools spoke passionately about how their staff go the extra mile to support and nurture children, and pointed to this dedication, along with staff's excellent knowledge of individual families, as one of their strongest assets in mitigating risk. In some cases, the large majority of extra support stemmed from one or two key members of staff, who were seen as crucial in building a strong rapport with children and families and also acted as a central hub for all staff to refer to when they had concerns about a pupil. Schools were aware of the challenges that this presented, and admitted that without certain staff in place their support structure would largely disintegrate. The reliance on individual staff is perhaps a result of the organic way in which each school's approach to supporting the most vulnerable children has developed. Schools have used the resources they have to create the best structure they can, and this often draws heavily on individual staff skills and knowledge.

Schools indicated that recent cuts to school budgets meant that in some cases the individual staff, programmes or interventions on which schools rely so heavily are now under threat. Schools expressed real anxiety about the new financial year approaching and with it the potential for further budget reductions. They felt this would translate into their having to cut services such as breakfast clubs, afterschool clubs and some forms of pastoral support, all of which they considered to be vital to the wellbeing of their pupils. In many cases schools had already cut additional support staff or programmes and felt that their loss was having an impact on the care they could provide. This was reflected by providers, who could see the impact that cuts were having and felt that a gap was being created.

> **'Schools need to be supported to be able to afford the services that their young people need, because if they don't have the money, sometimes these needs have to go unmet. However well-intentioned the schools might be, if they don't have the money, they can't do anything. If they can't fund it, it just doesn't happen.'**
>
> **Provider**

Staff were asked to consider how they selected services, programmes or specific responses to risks. While there was one group of schools that relied on trusted individuals such as their local educational psychologist to recommend services or interventions, another group indicated that it was largely done on a trial-and-error basis, involving personal recommendations and serendipitous opportunities, such as a provider getting in touch.

> **'It's not strategic if I'm being really honest.'**
>
> **School staff**

7. School relationships with wider partners

School use of statutory services

Our research explored the extent to which schools are making use of external services and providers, and also their relationship with these services, local authorities and the police.

School staff had very disparate knowledge of the services available to them, both in terms of statutory provision and services provided by independent or voluntary-sector providers. Knowledge varied considerably both within and between schools, and it was clear that because the relationship with key services such as CAMHS or social services were held by a handful of staff in each school, many staff were not fully aware of the options that are open to them. While some schools appear to use the full range of services offered by the local authority, others focused on those they knew best, and staff indicated that they were not always sure which services they could call on in each circumstance. One stakeholder who works with young people admitted that they didn't know until recently that there was an early help team in the borough, and said that they had found this lack of knowledge was also common in schools and were trying to find ways to help schools find out about the services that they could refer to for free.

Decisions about which services to use were partly determined by previous experience: staff would go to teams or individuals that they had formed relationships with in the past, or had heard about from colleagues at other schools. In the case of core services such as CAMHS or social services, some staff would partly base their approach on the response they had received in the past. Schools indicated that they would welcome more information and guidance about what services were available and when to use them.

Local authority stakeholders admitted to being unsure exactly how primary schools managed children at risk who fell below service thresholds and which services they used. It was suggested that the referral pathways for primary schools were not always clear and that schools therefore didn't always use services as well as they could.

> **'Secondary schools understand the services and they understand the thresholds for accessing those services and they do use those services well. But I think in primary schools it's less – I mean, I think they would say to you, "I'm really worried about it, it's a big issue in my area, yes, I can see these things happening, I can see there are older siblings" – but I think at the moment there isn't a pathway. And even if there was a pathway, I'm not sure we've clearly defined those services.'**
>
> **Stakeholder**

School staff also suggested that options were limited at primary school, and that they had the sense that provision from key stage 3 onwards was more comprehensive. Views of statutory services were clearly very influenced by the issues that schools encountered with them, and there was very limited praise. Instead, staff shared frustrations related to getting hold of relevant teams, frequent staff turnover and waiting times. What stood out most, however, was how different each school's experience seemed to be in terms of the services they used and

relied on, and the lack of clear pathways was very evident in the experiences that schools described.

Unsurprisingly, service thresholds were also a strong theme in the interviews. School staff were somewhat resigned to the high thresholds that exist for services such as CAMHS and Family Recovery Projects. Some indicated that if they had been told that one child didn't meet a service threshold previously, they may not refer another presenting similar characteristics. There was a clear concern on all sides about what happens to the children who don't meet thresholds and for whom there is currently no clear referral pathway, and participants felt that this was an area that urgently needed addressing.

> **'We can be utterly worried about a child, really tearing our hair out worried ... we finally get to the point where we can make the call to social services and we just get told "not our thresholds" … I've got a case at the minute that I'm just going to keep taking higher and higher until somebody pays attention to me 'cos I'm not happy … I do think there's a sense [that] I wouldn't necessarily know what's out there that could target vulnerable children before they hit the social services threshold.'**
>
> **School staff**

School relationships with local authorities and police

There was a sense on all sides that the relationship between schools and local authorities had changed in recent years. Schools and providers mentioned that there used to be more information in relation to gangs and youth violence coming from local authorities, and that this had tapered off. Schools indicated feeling unclear about which services were available to them and unsure whether the processes in place were sufficient or being followed through.

> **'There was a big push on children, I think there still is, who are at risk of joining gangs and violence. So we would report it to safeguarding, but I don't think much happened in response to it … I sometimes get the feeling that I am reporting it for the sake of reporting it, that I feel nothing will be done about it, and that's very disheartening.'**
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> **School staff**

The increased disconnect between schools and local authorities was attributed in part to funding cuts and there being less money to spend on services and specific priorities. Providers described a noticeable shift in the way that services are commissioned by local authorities now, with more-involved tendering processes making it harder to get money now for the work that they do. The rise in autonomy of some schools, including the increase in academies and free schools, was also thought to play a role in local authorities becoming more distant.

The difference in the nature of the relationship between schools and the relevant teams in their local authority was striking. Some schools clearly felt very comfortable navigating the services on offer and had formed strong relationships with the relevant teams in the local authority. Others had more limited contact and seemed unclear about what support was available or who they should be contacting.

The same was true of relationships with community police. While some schools reported having very strong relationships with their community police team, others couldn't identiy the last time they had seen them. Strong relationships with local police were largely attributed to the personality of the individual police officers involved. Schools who had had a strong community police officer, either currently or in the past, felt that they were a great asset, since they would get to know the

local schools well and keep them informed about relevant community issues. These schools valued the frequent contact, and the chance for police to proactively engage with the school community and to help to prevent issues, rather than only responding when there was a problem.

Those schools who had less of a relationship with local police attributed it either to a change in community officer or to the local team's response to incidents they had reported. In some instances, schools had reached out to their local police but not had a response, or had been told that there were not sufficient staff to cover the problem, or they had reported an incident but had had limited follow-up. These kinds of interactions were considered discouraging to schools.

> **'Often if it's a serious issue, you report it to the police and then it's kind of in their hands. We don't really get much feedback about what's happened next. For example, it must have been about six months ago, we found a knife within the school grounds … we informed the police, but there was no feedback as to what we should do as a school to follow up. I don't know if they investigated further or left it as-is. It would be nice to have some advice of what to say to the pupils.'**
> **School staff**

There was appetite across the board for stronger relationships with both the local authority and police. Both schools and stakeholders indicated that in an ideal world there would be greater link-up between primary schools, early help teams in local authorities and the police. It was thought that this would help with both early risk identification and referral. Stakeholders spoke about how, to date, the limited resources available to local authorities and police had been weighted towards secondary schools. However, there was some sense that this needs to change, and that there is a general shift towards more early intervention which may impact on this. This theme is explored more in chapter 11 below.

School use of voluntary-sector providers

The diversity of voluntary-sector providers used was partly down to what was available in each borough and partly based on awareness. Schools recounted how they had had to reduce the volume of provision they bought in because of funding cuts. There were frequent mentions of providers that staff had used in the past and frustrations that these services were no longer affordable or available to the school.

Current providers being used ranged in type from those focused on wellbeing, such as Place2Be, to charities specialising in sports for boys who are considered at risk. Workshops provided by organisations that focus on educating schools about youth violence such as Growing Against Violence (GAV) were seen as crucial in supporting the school, and in some cases such organisations represented the school's key or only strategy to mitigate risk from gang and youth violence.

Decisions about which interventions or providers to use were largely reliant on recommendations from other schools within their network, or key contacts within the local authority, as well as approaches from providers themselves.

Headteacher conferences were named as a key route for receiving provider recommendations. In some instances, providers were chosen simply because they had got in touch with the school directly. Budget was also a primary factor in decision-making, and interventions or providers were often brought in because they were free. Some staff indicated that they weren't sure where to look for

evidence about the best approaches or providers, and said that they would welcome guidance on where to look and support in choosing appropriate solutions.

Evaluation of interventions and providers was patchy and relatively light-touch where it was in place. Some schools used pre- and post-measures to help understand how children had progressed. For example, one school spoke about asking children to draw a picture and talk about themselves before and after they took part in an intervention, and there was a mention of a wellbeing scoring system being used in one case. However, many relied on the more ad-hoc assessments of teaching staff about how well pupils were progressing, both in terms of academic attainment and in relation to behaviour in the classroom.

9. Views on what is working well in primary schools

Participants from all groups were asked to reflect on what they felt was working best within schools in terms of risk identification and providing support to pupils considered to be at risk.

Relationships with parents and families: Schools pointed to the relationships that they form with children and their families as one of their key successes. Staff spoke about how they make a point of waiting at the school gates in the morning to greet parents, and maintain an open-door policy where families are not only able to come and see them any time but are also treated openly and honestly when they do. Many schools saw their relationship with families as being of vital importance to supporting children successfully, and there were several examples of initiatives that schools had undertaken to try and increase and improve communication with families. In one instance, a school had started using a book that both parents and the learning mentor could write in, so that each had more of a complete picture about what was going on with the child. Staff also spoke about their efforts in supporting parents who might be having a difficult time: the fact that staff would often notice when a family was in crisis or in need of additional support was seen as being very beneficial. Many of the schools have long-serving staff, and the consistency of their presence coupled with the local knowledge of those who lived close by was seen as really helping to build trust with families and encourage more open communication.

The efforts of school staff: The genuine care that school staff have for their pupils was seen as a real boost to efforts to support those who are most vulnerable. Staff described the efforts of colleagues to ensure that children were well looked after, and there were frequent references to staff working way beyond their remit and contract in order to deliver the pastoral support they felt that the children needed. In smaller schools, this included all staff getting involved to support more vulnerable pupils and working hard to keep communication open, so that everyone was kept in the picture.

Having strong role models and encouraging aspirations: In some cases, it was felt that part of a school's strengths lay in its ability to help pupils to focus on their future and to nurture aspirations that would help prevent children from straying into risky behaviour. Schools cited specific staff, often men, who they considered to be excellent role models, especially for boys who may not have strong male role models at home. There were also discussions about the importance of providing vulnerable children with focus and nurturing skills, to build up aspirations and a sense of belonging. Schools were proud of the provision that they put on to encourage this, including free or subsidised afterschool clubs and learning mentors to focus on supporting children's confidence, self-esteem and focus.

Supporting children's wellbeing: Schools described the various ways in which they aimed to support pupils' social and emotional learning and saw these as bedrocks of their response to children being at risk. This included a strong PSHE curriculum and interventions designed to help children manage challenging situations. Some schools described how they aimed to create a family environment, and discussed the importance of children having a trusted adult that cares about them and listens to them. This belief had driven the

strategic decision of some schools to work one-on-one with children as much as possible. Indeed, one of the strongest themes to emerge was that schools feel it is important to respond to the individual child and their needs. Some pointed to this both as being a successful element of what they did and a reason why they didn't always have more formal processes in place to manage vulnerable children.

Some of the services available to schools: Although there was some criticism of statutory services there was also praise for individuals working within services and for individual contacts, such as educational psychologists. There was also a lot of credit given to some providers who were seen as vital in raising awareness and developing relevant skills, not just for pupils but for teachers and other school staff.

10. The biggest challenges for primary schools

Participants from all groups were asked to consider what barriers or challenges currently faced primary schools in supporting children who might be vulnerable to gang and youth violence or other risks. Some of the challenges have been brought out elsewhere in the report but are collated here for reference.

School factors

Workload and pressures on time were identified as challenges by stakeholders and schools alike. Gang and youth violence was seen as just one of a myriad of issues that schools have to deal with, and it was often not seen as a priority.

In some schools, staff were either unaware of the level of the gang and youth violence problem locally, or did not feel equipped to know what risk factors to look for. Providers said that they often encountered schools who knew very little about gangs or what to look out for, and that more education was needed in this area.

Providers and stakeholders also identified some practical difficulties in getting into schools. Stakeholders indicated that schools were all run in such an individual way that it could be hard to identify and speak to the right people. To get real access, it was necessary to form a relationship with individual staff members, and since each school dealt with these issues in its own way, identifying the right person could be difficult.

Lastly, school staff spoke about the importance of working with families to successfully support a child and the challenge of engaging some parents. When parents were unwilling to engage it became much more difficult to get the right provision in place for that child, and it could often be the parents of the most at-risk children who were least willing to engage. Schools felt that there was not sufficient provision to help them with supporting a whole family rather than the child alone. Some school staff said that the combination of high thresholds and waiting lists made it harder for them to engage parents. They would get families on board at the referral point, and then the momentum would be lost if the referral did not result in a service, or took a long time to come through. In the end, parents could lose trust or interest.

Multi-agency working

Several challenges identified by schools and stakeholders fall under the broad heading of 'multi-agency working', which includes working with the voluntary and community sector.

Some schools indicated a lack of awareness about the services available to them, both statutory services via the local authority and those provided by independent or voluntary and community-sector providers. However, our research also indicated that local authority stakeholders did not necessarily know that schools were looking for more information:

> **'There are people in different teams who they go to, they might go to the educational psychologist, the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), their adviser, the school improvement adviser – I feel we have a really good network of communications in [this borough] and schools know where to go for that information.'**
>
> **Stakeholder**

Finding the right support and interventions for children and families was seen as a related problem by schools and stakeholders. One of the stakeholders spoke about a young person who had been involved in 30 different interventions over 11 years and yet still ended up in prison. There was a clear need for more evidence and guidance about what works for different children, and more support for schools to take a more targeted approach. There was a sense that sometimes interventions could be funded by central or local government without sufficient understanding of the local context.

A range of issues were raised relating to thresholds and referral pathways. High thresholds in key services meant that many children were 'bounced back' after being referred by schools. Schools could be left feeling that they needed to deal with them, often without being aware of the support that may be available for that child. Stakeholders echoed the challenges that schools can experience in this regard.

> **'It's difficult isn't it? Schools are there to educate children, children's specialist services are there to safeguard children – there is a gap between risk and where statutorily the local authority has a right to intervene.'**
>
> **Stakeholder**

More broadly, school staff spoke about a lack of clear referral pathways for primary school children. It was felt that the referral routes for children at risk of gang involvement were currently focused on secondary school pupils. This meant that each primary school was handling the issue in a slightly different way and, in some cases, was unsure about what their response should be.

On a related point, schools spoke about poor links between different services, especially in the early years. They often found themselves in a situation where a child arrived at school needing considerable support, and yet the school has been given no background about them by the health visiting team or anyone who had previously supported that child.

> **'We've had children coming to school with really quite severe needs and just kind of rocking up and not knowing anything about them previously.'**
>
> **School staff**

National policy

Some schools felt strongly that the current national curriculum placed too much emphasis on maths and English and not enough on PSHE or subjects that support children's social and emotional learning and wellbeing. Some staff became quite emotional as they described how restricted they felt by the current syllabus, and how strongly they thought that there should be a shift in emphasis to allow more time in the day for this kind of social and emotional learning. There was a view that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly affected by the focus on SATS tests, maths and literacy, because they were likely to be further behind to start with. Schools with higher proportions of children from disadvantaged backgrounds had to cut back even more on PSHE and social and

emotional learning because they had to push harder to bring their children up to standard in maths and English.

> **'These children need so much more PSHE and stuff than children who come from backgrounds where they might typically be more supported, but they're actually getting less of it because they also need more maths and English and that's how schools get judged.'**
>
> School staff

Budget challenges were the other big contextual issue identified by schools and by stakeholders. Schools lamented having had to cut provision for children who were most at risk, and many we spoke to feared that they would need to cut more. Stakeholders also felt that budgets were a major problem, partly because budget restrictions meant that services did not run in the way that they should, but also because they felt that budget challenges could result in the wrong interventions or insufficiently qualified staff working with schools. Providers were also feeling the effects of budget cuts. They compared the support they had received when they first started out, when local authorities willingly paid for their services, to the current climate where they had to fight hard to get the funding needed to work with schools.

11. Views on potential solutions and changes needed

Early intervention

Participants were asked to reflect on where they felt the solutions lay and what practical or systemic changes could be made to support primary schools in risk identification and management.

One of the clearest overarching themes to emerge from this was the need for earlier intervention. Schools, stakeholders and providers alike felt that more should be done at the primary school stage to tackle not just gang and youth violence but other risks facing children as well. The schools which considered gang and youth violence to be a priority talked about how they worked hard to support children as early as possible. In one example, the school started identifying children to work with the learning mentor from nursery onwards. This was seen as working well because it enabled the school to build a strong relationship with the children and their families from an early age, and to help promote children's confidence, self-esteem and focus. There was a sense among some staff that children were most vulnerable to risks relating to gang involvement and youth violence when they were very young, and that behaviours were quite entrenched by years 5 and 6.

This view was mirrored by stakeholders, who agreed that local authorities needed to start targeting children earlier 'because we have got kids as young as 11 that have been charged with serious violence offences, so 12, 13, 14 is possibly too late' (stakeholder).

It was felt that there should be a move towards targeting children and young people who are not yet involved with statutory services but who may well be if they are left unsupported. The priority would be the group of children who don't meet the threshold for key services at primary school age, who are often left to fall through the cracks in the system. The potential cost and resources benefits of early intervention were also highlighted; if gang behaviour is reduced then so too are the crimes that can go with them, such as shoplifting and drug dealing.

> **'The real benefit, I suppose, is if you are managing to get in there early you cut down a lot of demand further down, so if you prevent the child going into a gang, and make sure they have stable childhood and they are able to thrive and that type of thing, then you will probably cut down on a lot of demand later when you are not having to deal with them for assaulting people … getting assaulted themselves. It is important to point out that young people are not just perpetrators of the violence but also the victims of the violence as well.'**
>
> **Stakeholder**

Providers also spoke about the importance of reaching children before secondary school age, when they were seen as less likely to listen and more likely to fall in with the wrong crowd. There was consensus that the groundwork had to be laid before that stage.

> **'By the time they get into secondary school, they're completely consumed by their ability to fit in, and to not stand out, and to make friends with the people who perhaps are the coolest but not necessarily the most positive influences on them. If you don't know them at that stage, it's very hard to reach them and turn it around. You have to have a relationship with them before that, otherwise they don't want to listen to you.'**
>
> **Provider**

It was felt that a move to early intervention would need to be holistic and to include all statutory services and the police, who currently focus heavily on secondary school-age children.

School support

Schools felt that recent budget cuts had forced them to reduce their investment in specialist staff who could deliver support to vulnerable children, such as learning mentors, various therapists and educational psychologists. They felt that increasing this investment again would be one of the most important things they could do.

School staff also identified a need for more training on the signs of gang involvement and risk identification. They wanted to understand more both about how gangs work and how children are recruited to them, and about the risk indicators that they should be looking for. One idea was the creation of a bulletin on gang and youth violence, along the lines of what schools currently receive in relation to female genital mutilation. This was echoed by providers, who felt that understanding more about gang and youth violence should be part of the curriculum for teachers, and that teachers should be trained on it in the way that they are for CSE and other risk areas.

Both school staff and providers thought that it was important to have schools at least partially staffed by people who live locally, know some of the local families, and understand the specific issues that an area faces. Having this knowledge was seen as integral to being able to gain the trust of some families and to recognise some of the signs of risk in children.

School staff also felt that there needed to be a better transition from primary to secondary school. While children were at primary school it was easier to keep them safe, but that once they moved to secondary school it became much harder. Schools said that they did what they could to make the transition as easy as possible, and the providers we spoke to said that year 6 was a priority year for them, as workshops and services could help to prepare pupils for secondary school. However, there was a sense that this transition remains problematic. Part of the issue lies in the move from a nurturing environment to a more challenging one, but it was also pointed out that for some children it is a case of suddenly becoming a small fish in a big pond. A child who excelled in football at primary school, for example, may no longer be one of the best at secondary school, and many consequently stop playing. That child then has less to focus on or feel positive about, and the potential for risky behaviour increases. It was felt that this transition period needed extra attention, especially for those children considered to be vulnerable to gang and youth violence or other issues.

Multi-agency working

It was recognised that there were considerable challenges to increasing early intervention. One view was that the current infrastructure did not support effective early intervention because of the heavy caseload of children's services. It was suggested that systemic change may be needed, such as the creation of a new early help team or other type of commissioned service, possibly even a voluntary organisation, that could link up with schools and offer support early on.

There was also a recognition that genuine early intervention would require a shift in mindset for the Metropolitan Police, who it was felt did not yet see early intervention as a serious route to crime prevention.

The lack of budget and a sense of there being numerous competing priorities was raised as another potential hurdle to effective early intervention.

> **'And the local authority, I mean, they've been cut back to the bone, their safeguarding's in special measures still and I would say in terms of kind of anything like this … I think we have reported children where they're at risk of gang involvement, we think, say like they've been wearing a bandana in school or whatever, or using inappropriate language, but although that's a national priority, I just think they haven't got the resources … it's preventative work and I don't think they've got the sort of resources to do it.'**
>
> **School staff**

The need for better multi-agency working was recognised by participants in every group. This included linking up early years services with schools, so that primary schools are better informed about children who had specific needs and brought into discussions about children who are at risk, since school is both where children spend a large portion of their time and where they encounter many of their key role models.

> **'The link-up between primary schools, the early help offer and policing is vital, so if I were able to save a magic wand, then we'd have fully trained and aware people in primary schools, knowing and understanding the indicators of the potential to go into a gang and being able to refer that onwards somewhere – perhaps in the early help team within the local authority, who would then be able to put the resources into ensuring that that child doesn't go into gangs.'**
>
> **Stakeholder**

When asked whether schools had a responsibility to identify and deal with children at risk of gang and youth violence, school staff strongly agreed that this was the case, but also felt that it wasn't something that they could tackle alone. They argued for more coordination between schools and other services, for example by having police situated within primary schools (as they are in secondary schools), and greater support for schools to work with families as a whole.

There was a clear view that the most effective provision targets the whole family rather than just the child alone, and that there should be more focus on family support workers and family-focused provision. Schools spoke about the high thresholds that exist for services such as Family Recovery Projects. They suggested that one of the most helpful things that could be done for them would be the potential to refer to and work alongside a family support worker or some sort of community worker, so that the needs of the child could be addressed with full understanding of what was happening with their family.

Lastly, it is clear from this research that knowledge, both about what services are available and what is effective, is very patchy among primary schools. There were school staff we spoke to who spontaneously suggested that they would welcome an increase in information about their options, both in terms of free services through the local authority and those that the school might choose to buy in. They would also welcome more information about how to access evidence on what works, and would like to feel more confident and supported in making informed decisions.

National policy

While the term 'social and emotional learning' wasn't used widely in schools, the principle of equipping children to be resilient, have confidence and self-esteem, a positive self-image and empathy was seen as vital in supporting children at risk of gang and youth violence. Greater emphasis on PSHE and soft skills subjects both within the curriculum and as a focus for Ofsted – along with a slightly reduced emphasis on maths and English – was seen as one of the routes to achieving this. Another was having access to high-quality interventions and providers who could work with children one-on-one or in small groups.

12. Policy implications

Efforts to prevent gang involvement need to start as early as possible, and primary school is an important setting in which to support children at risk of later involvement in gang and youth violence. It is clear that opportunities are being missed at the moment. The reasons for this are complicated, but our research, coupled with our previous work in this area, points to some important implications for policy-makers both at the national level and London-wide level.

As many of our participants recognised, the risk factors for later involvement in gangs or violence are the same as the risk factors for other negative outcomes for children. While this report is focused on the particular problems of gang involvement and youth violence, its core messages are broader ones about the role of primary schools in identifying vulnerable children and supporting them to develop the social and emotional skills they need for their future success and wellbeing.

Implications for policymakers

Primary schools could play a critical role in early intervention to prevent gang and youth violence, as well as other poor outcomes for children. They want to do this, but their efforts are hampered by barriers within the wider system. In this respect, the main issues are as follows.

1. There is a gap between what the evidence tells us works and what is actually being delivered in schools.

Schools *are* bringing in external providers of programmes to support children, in spite of budgetary and other pressures. However, decisions about which programmes to bring into the school are not driven by the evidence base or careful matching of programmes to needs, and these programmes are rarely evaluated. Sometimes these programmes are funded by national government or other 'arm's-length' funders, without due regard to the evidence base or the 'fit' with local need.

- There is an urgent need for accessible messages for schools and others working locally about the evidence base: what has been shown to work, and for whom.
- Central government, police and crime commissioners and other funders have an important role to play, and should ensure that they make funding decisions based on the evidence of what works to prevent gang and youth violence.

2. There is a need to support social and emotional learning in schools.

This is a particularly pertinent issue for schools in deprived areas. Inequalities in the development of these skills can be seen in children as young as three, with children from poorer backgrounds tending to have lower levels of self-control and emotional health than those from better-off backgrounds.

We know that schools-based programmes designed to foster children's social and emotional skills, implemented carefully within the right 'whole-school' environment, can have an impact on later involvement in crime and violence, as well as upstream indicators like aggression, mental health problems and substance misuse. Our work has shown that these are among the best-evidenced approaches to preventing involvement in gangs and violence.

- We support the call for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) to be compulsory in all schools, with dedicated time and a curriculum that reflects the current evidence base. We believe it is also critical that the new

Ofsted common inspection framework include specific consideration of how effectively schools are supporting the development of social and emotional skills.

- There is a need to implement high-quality social and emotional learning programmes within the context of a whole-school approach. As part of adopting a whole school approach to SEL, we need to support schools in moving away from piecemeal, fragmented and reactionary approaches to particular challenges facing their pupils and towards a social-ecological model that acknowledges the influence of peers, school, parents, families and the community.

3. Primary schools are poorly integrated into wider early help arrangements.

This is in spite of the critical role they can play in spotting risk factors and providing children and families with the kinds of early support that can reduce the need for more specialist interventions later on. Primary schools need to understand their role in the wider system and the expectations of them. They need to be confident that they can refer children who do not meet statutory thresholds for social care or CAMHS intervention, and that those children and their families will receive support. In-school support for vulnerable children needs to be coordinated with wider support for the family, such as parenting support.

- At a time when many local authorities are seeking to find efficiencies though integrating their children's and youth support services with those of partner agencies, we need to better understand the most promising ways of doing this. Further work should be done to explore views about the most promising ways in which schools can be linked into wider early help arrangements.

4. Relationships between local police and primary schools vary considerably.

These relationships range from police officers regularly delivering sessions to children, through to very little contact. We are not aware of any robust evidence for the impact of any of these approaches. Local policing resources are increasingly stretched, and it is essential that they are used in the most productive ways to support policing objectives, schools and the wider early help infrastructure.

- Further work should be done to look in more detail at the nature of these relationships across the country, and in testing the impact of some of these arrangements, to inform police force decisions about the allocation and role of neighbourhood officers or police community support officers (PCSOs) in relation to primary schools.

Further work in Lambeth and Wandsworth

This research is the first output of a three year project. We will consider the implications of this research with the participating local authorities, schools and other stakeholders. We will be working with them over the next two years to co-design, implement and test new evidence-based or evidence-informed approaches to preventing gang and youth violence through effective early intervention.

Appendix: Methodology

Sampling and recruitment

Schools

The research was carried out with three schools in each borough, six in total.

Qualitative research aims to map the range and diversity of views relating to an issue, and a purposive sampling approach was employed whereby the aim was to recruit schools with a range of characteristics each of which might influence their views or experiences of the issues. Quotas were set for each of these characteristics. Alongside these quotas attention was also paid to the location of each school within the two boroughs, in terms of their distance from known gang 'hotspots'.

An initial list of schools was drawn up based on the sampling matrix and this was given to the two local authorities to review. This process meant that sampling was an iterative process whereby the list of desired characteristics was combined with local authority knowledge about the schools' location and likely proximity to gang and youth violence issues, as well as pragmatic decisions about an individual school's likelihood of engaging. While the intention was to recruit schools with a range of experiences, it was considered unhelpful to recruit any for whom the issues were completely irrelevant.

As recruitment progressed the sampling criteria were adjusted slightly. For example, there was originally a quota set to include a school with a low percentage of pupils receiving free school meals. However, this quota was later adjusted as it became apparent that the only schools with a low percentage of pupils receiving free school meals were in locations deemed less relevant to the research questions.

Table 1 (over) sets out the final characteristics of the achieved schools sample along with the original quotas that were set.

Schools were approached either directly, through a local authority contact or a contact at one of the schools' networks. An initial email and information leaflet was sent to each school which set out the aims of the research, what participation would involve and the voluntary nature of participation. In most cases, this was followed up by a telephone call to discuss research participation, answer any questions or concerns, and arrange a suitable time for the interview.

Initial contact with schools was generally with the headteacher or deputy head. They asked to identify three members of staff who would be willing to be interviewed and who could present different experiences of the school and its processes. Schools were asked to include each of:

- a class teacher or teaching assistant
- someone from the senior leadership team
- someone who specialised in working with vulnerable children where possible (such as a Learning Mentor, Senco or safeguarding lead).

These roles were selected in order to maximise the diversity of views in each school while ensuring relevance to the issues. In some cases, these roles intersected, so a deputy head may also be the school's safeguarding lead, for example. Table 2 (over) shows the achieved sample of school staff, by just one of their roles to preserve participants' anonymity.

TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS IN SAMPLE

Sampling criteria	Category	Quota	Number of schools in achieved sample
Ofsted rating	Outstanding	At least 1	2
	Good	At least 1	3
	Requires Improvement	At least 1	1
	Inadequate	No quota but monitor	0
% of pupils meeting the expected standard score	National average and above (≥ 53%)	At least 1	1
	Below national average (<53%)	At least 1	5
Overall rate of absence	National average & above (≥ 4%)	At least 2	4
	Below national average (< 4%)	At least 1	2
% of pupils receiving free schools meals	High	At least 1	2
	Medium	At least 1	4
	Low	At least 1	0
Local authority	Wandsworth	At least 3	3
	Lambeth	At least 3	3

TABLE 2: SCHOOL STAFF ACHIEVED SAMPLE

School staff role	Number interviewed
Headteacher	4
Deputy headteacher	1
Assistant head teacher	3
Class teacher	5
Teaching assistant	2
Deputy safeguarding lead	1
Learning mentor	1
SENCO	1
Total number of school staff interviews	**18**

Stakeholders and providers

The research also included interviews with stakeholders and providers working in the area. Stakeholders were selected so that there were some from each borough. A snowballing approach was employed, whereby initial contacts in each local authority were asked about the most relevant people to interview and interviewees themselves were asked to identify other relevant participants.

The decision to include providers was taken relatively late on in the research. This was driven by the data that was emerging from the school interviews and indications that providers were playing a significant part in schools' response to the issues. Providers were selected partly on the basis of the names that had been given during the interviews with schools and partly based on information that had come through as part of other work undertaken for this project, involving the mapping of organisations that work specifically in the area of mitigating gang and youth violence. Since the decision to include providers was taken relatively late on, only three were included in the sample.

The achieved sample of stakeholders and providers can be seen in Tables 3 and 4.

TABLE 3: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Name	Title and organisation	Organisation	Borough
Kristian Aspinall	Lead commissioner for crime and disorder	London borough of Lambeth	Lambeth
Laura Basset	Business development manager	Young Lambeth Co-op	Lambeth
Lucy Davies	Early help development officer	London borough of Wandsworth	Wandsworth
Judith Hare	School improvement adviser, health and wellbeing, Lambeth Council	London borough of Lambeth	Lambeth
David McCollum	Senior commissioner for crime and disorder	London borough of Lambeth	Lambeth
Richard Neville	Detective chief inspector	Wandsworth Police	Wandsworth
Eileen Shannon	Headteacher	Victoria Drive Pupil Referral Unit	Wandsworth

TABLE 4: PROVIDER INTERVIEWS

Name	Title	Organisation
Ann Cayenne	Operations manager of the boys' development team	Working with Men
Nathaniel Peat	Founder and CEO	The Safety Box
Shaun Willshire	Operations and safeguarding manager	Growing Against Violence

Fieldwork and analysis

Fieldwork took place between June and November 2017.

All school interviews were conducted face-to-face, while stakeholder and provider interviews were a combination of face-to-face and via telephone. Interviews typically lasted between 40 minutes and an hour.

Interviews were guided by pre-agreed topic guides. Topic guides set out the key areas to be covered in interviews, but allow flexibility to explore key areas of interest and unanticipated subjects. The topic guides covered all the key research aims and differed slightly for each of the participant groups.

Interviews were audio recorded with the participants' permission to allow for accurate and robust analysis. Permission was also sought for stakeholders and providers to be named in the report. However, all participants were told that individual views and quotes would be anonymised. All participants were told that they had the right to change their mind about participating at any point up until publication.

Each school interview was carried out by a researcher and accompanying notetaker, to ensure accurate data capture. The presence of a second researcher at the interviews also allowed for any areas that hadn't been probed fully enough to be picked up at the end.

The framework method of analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. This involves summarising the data from each research interview into a thematic framework. Columns represent themes and each participant's data is summarised (charted) across a row. The strength of this approach is that it enables systematic and comprehensive analysis of the complete data set in a manageable way. Analysis can be done both thematically or individually. This approach ensures that the findings are robust and grounded in the data. Verbatim quotes were taken directly from the audio recordings.

Limitations of the research

Since it was necessary to ensure the relevance of the material to the schools involved, the sampling approach was not entirely based on selecting schools with the characteristics identified in the sampling matrix. The approach involved input from the two local authorities about which schools they thought would find the research most relevant and be willing to take part, as well as pragmatic decisions from the research teams about the likelihood of the interview chiming with staff. So there was a certain element of self-selection. This research cannot therefore be seen to fully map the range of views that exist within schools in the two boroughs on these issues. Nonetheless, some very clear themes were identified and echoed across the interviews, so we can be reasonably confident that these findings would translate to schools with similar characteristics as those where we conducted interviews, even if we cannot be certain that the findings apply to all schools in the two boroughs or beyond.

Likewise, while attempts were made to recruit stakeholders with diverse experiences in each borough, in reality securing interviews with relevant people proved problematic, partly because of issues with identifying the most relevant people and partly because stakeholders' own workloads were high. Consequently, while the research engaged with a good range of roles, these roles were not always mirrored across the two boroughs, and so direct comparisons could not be drawn.