

Press release: Ofsted: Stronger partnerships needed to tackle knife crime

Schools in London aren't supported well enough when it comes to dealing with knife crime and need to be included in strong multi-agency partnerships, new research from Ofsted finds.

Today's [Ofsted report: Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime – lessons from London](#) found that while schools need to keep children safe, they do not have the ability to counter the complex societal problems behind the rise in knife crime. These need to be addressed by a range of partners including the police, local authorities and policy makers.

Ofsted's research looks at how schools, colleges, and pupil referral units (PRUs) in London protect children from knife violence in school, and how they teach pupils to stay safe outside school. The study also examines how exclusions are being used when children bring knives into school.

Overall, Ofsted's study shows that it is extremely rare that children are caught up in serious violence on school grounds. However, it is also clear that schools' valuable role in local partnerships is not being realised, leading to inconsistencies across London in the way schools respond.

The report finds:

- Schools have very different ways of dealing with knives and teaching children about the risks of carrying a knife. Schools need guidance about what works. Some schools shy away from using searches or specific education programmes because they are worried about sending the "wrong message" to parents, despite evidence that these methods can effectively deter children from bringing weapons into school.
- Inconsistent approaches to police involvement. School leaders have very different approaches to involving the police in incidents of knife-carrying, and there is an overall lack of clarity on when police involvement is necessary. This means that some children are more likely to be criminalised for their actions than others, depending on which school they go to, or even within the same school. Too often decisions are made on the basis of children's background, rather than the risk they pose to others.
- Clarity is needed on 'managed moves'. As an alternative to exclusion, pupils who carry knives are sometimes moved to other mainstream schools or PRUs. But no single body has a clear picture of the number of children who are moved, where they go, or for what reason. It is difficult to know what happens to these children, whether they are kept safe or what their educational outcomes are. The report recommends that the Department for Education collect data on managed moves in the same way it collects information on exclusions. This data will help Ofsted

and others to determine how effective managed moves are for children.

The report finds there is no evidence to suggest exclusions are the root-cause of the surge in knife violence. Children who carry knives almost invariably have complex problems that begin long before they are excluded.

While acknowledging that permanent exclusions are a necessary and important sanction, the report warns that some schools may be doing children a disservice by failing to follow statutory guidance on exclusions and considering whether early intervention or extra support can be put in place for children in groups with disproportionately high rates of exclusion – such as children in care. Exclusion may well be the right option in many cases, and schools must be able to take the necessary action to keep other pupils safe. However, it is important that all factors are considered.

For a longer term solution, it's imperative that partners work together on early help services that can prevent children from reaching the point of exclusion in the first place. The report acknowledges, however, the challenges local agencies face in prioritising resources for such services.

Mike Sheridan, Ofsted's Regional Director for London said:

Schools should be fully involved in local knife crime strategies, but too few are brought around the table. Only just over half of the schools surveyed were aware their borough had a knife crime strategy. Schools work effectively to keep their pupils safe, but they can be isolated from each other and other agencies, leading to inconsistencies in the way schools approach this issue.

It is clear that there is an overwhelming desire from different agencies to reduce the prevalence of knife crime. I hope that this insight into the issue through the eyes of school leaders will create momentum across London for a more co-ordinated approach to protecting vulnerable children from the dangers of knife violence.

Ofsted's research is based on survey responses from more than 100 secondary schools, colleges and PRUs across London. We also undertook 28 in-depth interviews with school, college and PRU leaders and focus groups with children and the parents of children who have been victims and/or perpetrators of knife crime. The inspectorate consulted an expert panel made up of academics, charitable organisations, headteachers, parents, youth workers and ex-gang members.