

The PREVENT Duty

Since July 2015, schools have had a legal responsibility to “have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”. The Prevent duty: departmental advice for schools and childcare providers [offers guidance on this](#).

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 is an important piece of legislation to support the Government’s approach to reducing the risk of terrorism in the UK, and to reduce the number of “home-grown” terrorists. Section 26 of the Act places a duty on schools in England and Wales to “tackle the ideological causes of terrorism”; this objective is known as the Prevent duty. The duty applies to all schools, organisations covered by the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and children’s homes, and should be seen as part of the organisation’s wider safeguarding obligations.

Given the rise of extremist voices it’s important that school staff know how to protect children and young people from this threat. Understanding how the Prevent duty is embedded as part of your school’s wider safeguarding policies will help you to:

- Protect students from radicalising influences
- Build your students’ resilience to extremist narratives
- Identify any vulnerabilities or worrying changes in behaviour
- Know what to do if you have concerns about a student

Prevent is not about spying on students or intruding unnecessarily into their families. It’s about making sure you can identify worrying behaviour and know how to refer those students who may be at risk of radicalisation for appropriate support.

There are no mandatory reporting requirements under the Prevent duty. If you have a concern, you should follow your school’s safeguarding procedures.

There are several things you can do to increase your pupils’ resilience to extremist narratives, such as:

- Making sure your classroom is a safe space where students can discuss ideas and controversial issues freely and openly
- Providing skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments
- Promoting the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

The Prevent duty should not stop pupils discussing controversial issues. On the contrary, it recognises that schools provide a safe space in which children and young people can debate ideas and discuss controversial issues. Promoting debates and discussions will help students understand the risks associated with terrorism and foster the knowledge and skills needed to challenge extremist arguments.

The Prevent duty has raised awareness and understanding of radicalisation as a safeguarding risk, how to identify children at risk, and where to go for support, including training, advice, and resources. The introduction of the duty has been accompanied by a substantial increase in the training and resources provided to schools around this relatively new area of safeguarding. Consequently, schools are more confident in dealing with the risk of radicalisation as part of their broader safeguarding responsibilities.

What is radicalisation and extremism?

The “preventing radicalisation” section in KCSiE remains under review following the publication of the new definition of extremism in March 2024.

Radicalisation is the process of a person legitimising support for, or use, of, terrorist violence.

Extremism is the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to:

- negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or
- undermine, overturn or replace the UK’s system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or
- intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve these results.

Terrorism is an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people; causes serious damage to property; or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

Do you know the four general themes the guidance covers?

Risk assessment – assessing the risk for children and young people in a school/academy involves understanding the local context and environment – particular risks could include children missing education, child sexual exploitation, local politics etc. Perhaps the biggest challenge is keeping all children and young people safe online.

Working in partnership - including with the police, local authority and social care. Effective engagement with parents/the family is also important as they are in a key position to spot signs of radicalisation. Schools should be able to assist and advise families who raise concerns and be able to point them to the right support mechanisms.

Staff training – to equip staff to be confident to identify children at risk of being drawn into terrorism and to challenge extremist ideas.

IT Policies – schools are required to ensure that children are safe from terrorist and extremist material when accessing the internet in schools. More generally, schools have an important role to play in equipping children and young people to stay safe online both in school and outside.

Staff responsibilities in relation to Prevent

- Schools have a vital role to play in protecting pupils from the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Keeping children safe from risks posed by terrorist exploitation of social media should be approached in the same way as safeguarding children from any other online abuse.
- If an adult in school has a concern for the safety of a specific young person at risk of radicalisation, they should follow the school’s safeguarding procedures, including discussing the concern with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and, if deemed necessary, with children’s social care. Staff can also contact the local police force or dial 101 (the non-emergency number).
- The local authority or police might suggest a referral to the “Channel” programme, a voluntary Government programme which aims to safeguard children and adults from being drawn into terrorist activity.

The Education Lead for PREVENT in Essex is Jo Barclay, Safeguarding Adviser to Schools.

British Values

All publicly-funded schools in England are required by law to teach a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. They must also promote community cohesion. Schools can build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values - defined as: democracy, mutual respect, rule of law, individual liberty, and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs -and by enabling them to challenge extremist views. It is important to emphasise that the Prevent duty is not intended to stop pupils debating controversial issues. On the contrary, schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments. It may also prompt them to raise concerns that staff may not otherwise be aware of.

Ofsted

Ofsted's main focus in relation to the Prevent duty is to confirm that **schools are fulfilling their statutory responsibilities to safeguard children from the risks of radicalisation and extremism** in line with the Prevent duty and Keeping Children Safe in Education.

During inspection, Ofsted will:

- **Evaluate whether staff can identify and respond to risks of radicalisation.**

Inspectors expect staff to be trained and able to recognise signs of radicalisation or extremism, and to know what to do if they are concerned.

Review policies, practices, and records.

Inspectors check that schools have clear and up-to-date safeguarding and Prevent policies, that risk assessments reflect local threats, and that there are mechanisms in place for referrals and information sharing.

Assess staff training.

Ofsted expects school staff — especially safeguarding leads — to receive Prevent training appropriate to their roles and local risk levels, in line with statutory guidance.

Check curriculum and IT safety measures.

Inspectors will consider how schools build pupils' resilience to radicalisation through the curriculum, and how they ensure safe internet use (e.g., filtering and monitoring systems) to reduce exposure to extremist content.

Confirm a “culture of safeguarding”.

Ofsted assesses whether safeguarding (including Prevent) is embedded in the school's ethos and daily life, ensuring pupils know who to speak to about concerns.

Channel

Channel is a voluntary, confidential support programme which focuses on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Prevent referrals may be passed to a multi-agency Channel panel, which will discuss the individual referred to determine whether they are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and consider the appropriate support required. An individual's engagement with the programme is entirely voluntary at all stage.

Far Right Extremism

In the UK the far right has varied in strength and organisation over the last few decades. The most prominent far right groups at present are the English Defence League (EDL) and Britain First (BF).

What causes radicalisation and how to spot the signs?

Radicalisation is the process of causing someone to become a supporter of terrorism, or forms of extremism that lead to terrorism

The concept of radicalisation is typically closely associated with ISIS (also known as IS or ISIL) but it does have much older origins

ISIS is said to have up to 20,000 “fighters” across Iraq and Syria with an estimated 2,000 Britons becoming radicalised and leaving the UK in the past couple of years. This includes at least 50 girls leaving to become Jihadi brides.

What causes radicalisation?

As yet, there has been no clear link or exact cause identified for someone becoming radicalised. This creates the sense that ‘it could happen to anyone’ which, in turn, increases the fear of radicalisation. The lack of an exact cause doesn’t mean we know nothing and it’s important to focus on what we do know and staying informed of current guidance.

Radicalisation is, after all, constantly shifting and changing.

What we know as of now is that the main risk factor identified in victims is vulnerability.

Those who are most vulnerable are (but not limited to):

- Younger people from age 13 upwards;
- Those experiencing an identity or personal crisis;
- Individuals with feelings of unmet aspirations or a sense of injustice;
- People with a need for adventure or excitement;
- Pre-existing conviction that their religion or culture is under threat;
- Individuals who feel socially isolated and possibly suffering from depression;
- Those who have a history of criminal behaviour.

It is thought that, for some, ISIS satisfy that need for identity and/or the sense of belonging. For others, they are taken in by the ‘glory and honour’ of the battle or thrill of the victory.

The radicalisation process

This vulnerability is exploited, in a similar fashion to the way sexual predators groom young people online, with promises of excitement, empowerment, glory and freedom along with more material rewards, such as cash, pets and housing. A personal connection is formed: you can be sat at home in the UK talking directly to an individual fighter in Syria who is bragging about his military accomplishments and offering you help and encouragement to travel to join him. To someone so disaffected, this attention is understandably compelling.

The process of radicalisation is rarely the same for two people and can be anything from slow and gradual to fast and effective, but underpinning the process is the strong brand ISIS have created via social media. It’s a brand that paints a seductive picture and acts as a compelling recruitment drive that inspires thousands of people to embark on a one-way journey to join their cause. In fact, it has been argued that ISIS’ social media strategy could rival the biggest brands in the world with ISIS holding, at any one time, over 45,000 Twitter accounts.

How to spot the tell-tale signs of radicalisation

[Managing risk of radicalisation in your education setting - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-risk-of-radicalisation-in-your-education-setting)

- Being overly secretive about their online viewing.
- Displaying feelings of isolation or expressions of an ‘us and them’ mentality – a sign of the sense of social isolation.
- Becoming more argumentative or domineering in their viewpoints, being quick to condemn those who disagree and ignoring views that contradict their own.
- Questioning their faith or identity.
- Downloading or promotion extremist content.
- Social isolation – losing interest in activities they used to enjoy, distancing themselves from friends and social groups.
- Altered appearance – change in style of dress and/or personal appearance.
- Abnormal routines, travel patterns or aspirations.

What should you do if you believe a pupil is at risk of radicalisation

If you think that a pupil is being radicalised, you must treat this as a safeguarding concern and follow your school’s established safeguarding procedures. The key steps are:

- Report your concerns immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Prevent Lead in your school. This is the principal safeguarding officer responsible for handling such concerns and deciding on further action.
- Record your concerns factually and accurately, including any observed behaviours, statements, or incidents, and the context in which they occurred.
- Do not investigate or confront the pupil yourself. Your role is not to assess risk independently or question the pupil directly, but to pass concerns to those trained to act on them.
- If a pupil is in immediate danger or you suspect they are about to commit a crime, contact the police straight away. For pupils not in immediate danger, the DSL will assess the information, may speak with the pupil and their parents/carers, and decide whether a referral to the local authority or Prevent programme is necessary.
- All concerns should be kept confidential and only shared with appropriate safeguarding personnel on a need-to-know basis.

You should trust your professional judgement and act promptly if something seems wrong, even if you are uncertain—better to raise a concern than risk missing the signs.

Additional guidance and further reading

- Prevent Duty guidance for England and Wales 2023 [Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Counter Extremism Strategy HM Government 2015
- Essex Prevent guidance and support
<https://schools.essex.gov.uk/safeguarding/prevent-guidance-and-support>
- The Prevent Duty: monitoring toolkit – helping schools meet their responsibilities
<https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/prevent-toolkit/>
- [Managing risk of radicalisation in your education setting - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Educate Against Hate <http://educateagainsthate.com/>
- E-learning training package [Prevent Awareness e-Learning - Educate Against Hate](#)
- Southend, Essex and Thurrock Prevent Policy and guidance
<https://www.essexsab.org.uk/media/1894/doc-set-prevent-policy-guidance-v4.pdf>
- Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2026
- Hope not Hate <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/>
- Anti-Terrorist Hotline 0800 789321
- DC 2677 Tess Wisbey, Essex Prevent Engagement Officer
tess.wisbey@essex.pnn.police.uk
- There are many misconceptions about Prevent, you can read more in this [Prevent mythbuster](#).