

Protection Approaches

Evidence submission to the Education Select Committee: The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

Executive Summary

1. This submission addresses the questions set out on the terms of reference of this inquiry as they relate to the mental health and safety of young people, effects on disadvantaged groups, and future resilience of the education system.
2. We know from our work on identity-based violence around the world that times of crisis and health disasters can undermine social cohesion and inflame prejudices; we know too that joined-up educational responses can strengthen individual and societal resilience. Pre-Covid, Protection Approaches had long been concerned about the trajectory of risk factors for identity-based violence in the UK, documenting in our 2019 'Gathering Storm' series how the EU referendum and its consequences exacerbated divisions.¹ In the years since, hate incidents, public prejudice, disinformation, and social tensions have continued to rise. These negative trends have adversely affected young people and school environments, with increased incidents of xenophobia logged in schools.² Now Covid-19 is exacerbating challenges facing the education sector. Unequal access to online learning has worsened inequality, particularly for vulnerable children or those from disadvantaged backgrounds.³ The spread of misinformation and conspiracy is fuelling xenophobia, discrimination, and polarisation, undermining already weakened social cohesion.⁴ The legacy of collective and individual grief that Covid-19 will leave behind has serious implications for schools, our communities, and the mental health and wellbeing of students, teachers, and families.⁵ We have found that although education is central to disrupting the path to IBV, schools continue to lack the capacity, capabilities, and resources to meet these challenges.⁶
3. We therefore recommend that this inquiry, local and national government, and NGO coalitions ensure schools have the space and resources to prioritise joined-up educational responses that support young people to develop the emotional, social, and civic skills that will build resilience during and after the pandemic.

About Protection Approaches

4. Protection Approaches is the UK's leading charity working to confront identity-based violence, in the UK and around the world. PA collaborates with local partners to deliver programmes with some of the UK's more marginalised groups to find community-led means of a building stronger, intersectional and inclusive society. Protection Approaches is a registered charity in England and Wales, charity number 1171433. For more information please see www.protectionapproaches.org
5. This submission has been prepared by Dilia Zwart, Senior Education Officer at Protection Approaches. Dilia Zwart leads Protection Approaches' national schools programme and coordinates community outreach projects with community partners across London. She produced a major 2018 report 'Peace Education: Making the Case' for the Quaker Council for

¹ [Gathering Storm: assessing the risks of identity-based violence in Britain, Protection Approaches, March 2019](#)

² [Xenophobic bullying souring lives of eastern European pupils in UK, the Guardian, August 2019](#)

³ [Coronavirus: School closures will leave children from poorest families a week and a half behind classmates, research suggests, The Independent, May 2020](#)

⁴ [Covid-19 Disinformation Briefing Number 1, ISD, March 2020](#)

⁵ [Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting community resilience in the aftermath of disaster, Jack Saul, Routledge, 2014](#)

⁶ [Building resilience through education: Covid-19 and beyond, Protection Approaches, May 2020](#)

European Affairs.⁷ She has developed and delivered education programmes that build civic and critical skills as the co-founder of the Mostar Summer Youth Programme in Bosnia-Herzegovina. She has a BA in Social Anthropology from Harvard University, and a MA in International Studies and Diplomacy from the School of Oriental and African Studies.

6. For further details or questions relating to this submission please contact Dilia Zwart at dilia.zwart@protectionapproaches.org

Protection Approaches education team's response to Covid-19

7. Our work on identity-based violence around the world has taught us that health crises can have devastating, divisive, and potentially violent, consequences for marginalised and minority communities in all societies. Schools are themselves communities; during times of national crisis, inflamed social tensions and prejudices can adversely affect the school environment. In the academic year following the EU referendum, hate crimes in and around schools and colleges jumped 62%.⁸ The NSPCC warned in 2019 that racial abuse and bullying of children in UK had risen by a fifth since 2015-16.⁹ In the years since, social tensions have continued to rise. In 2019 we found that exclusionary populist movements, hate crime, violent extremism, and all forms of IBV had grown in strength; and that preventative action on all levels of society was vital to safeguarding our democracy and the long-term security of our minority and vulnerable groups.¹⁰ We judged that the UK's social resilience was low and ill-equipped to meet further stress or overcome moments of rupture.¹¹ In this context, we argued that the Covid-19 crisis risks accelerating these trends and requires timely, effective preventative measures to mitigate the consequences and lay the foundation for a more resilient, inclusive society.¹² The educational response to Covid-19 is vital to contributing to building societal resilience.
8. Our work on identity-based violence demonstrates that investing in educational and whole-school approaches to cohesion are the most effective ways to strengthen students' sense of wellbeing, resilience, and empowerment in times of crisis and grief. Our research with UK communities underscores widespread support for formal education to prioritise teaching young people about differences and identity through positive debate and dialogue.¹³ Education that nurtures empathy, critical thinking, and respect for differences was the most frequently cited solution to the European prevention crisis during our 2019 consultation.¹⁴
9. When Covid-19 forced the closure of UK schools to all except vulnerable young people and the children of key workers, Protection Approaches' education team asked educators across England and Wales what support we (as well as our partners and policymakers) could provide as they navigate the short- and long-term challenges of the crisis.¹⁵ We found that 77% want more support in helping young people play a role in building kind and resilient communities, and 74% would like resources that help students recognise fake news and think critically about information consumption. A further 73% would like training on whole school approaches to building tolerance and resilience among students.

⁷ [Peace Education: Making the case, Quaker Council for European Affairs, January 2019](#)

⁸ [Hate crime numbers in and around schools and colleges up 62% in a year, figures show, The Independent, January 2018](#)

⁹ [Children whitening skin to avoid racial hate crime, charity finds, The Guardian, May 2019](#)

¹⁰ [We need to reverse the rising tide of hate in the UK, Kate Ferguson, October 2019](#)

¹¹ [Would no-deal Brexit lead to a rise in hate crime?, Hugo Lucas, October 2019](#)

¹² [Atrocity Prevention and Covid-19: Opportunities and responsibilities, Protection Approaches, April 2020](#)

¹³ [Prejudice and us: How do we bridge community divides? Views from West London, Protection Approaches, June 2018](#)

¹⁴ [Europe's Prevention Crisis: How can civil society respond?, Protection Approaches, October 2019](#)

¹⁵ [What educators say: how can we support educators during and after Covid-19?, Protection Approaches, May 2020](#)

10. Our education team is now producing resources for Key stages 3 and 4 on recognising dangerous speech and disinformation, including video interviews with victims of Covid-related hate. We are also developing an online training programme for teachers on whole-of-school approaches to building inclusiveness and resilience.

Prioritising young peoples' sense of wellbeing and resilience

11. While the risks of Covid-19 to young people are considered to be relatively low, research on natural disasters makes clear that children are more vulnerable than adults to the emotional impact of traumatic events that disrupt their daily lives.¹⁶ The legacy of collective and individual grief that Covid-19 will leave behind has serious implications for young people, schools, and communities.¹⁷ Research demonstrates that social isolation and loss of social connectedness is damaging for young people, linked with mental health problems including depression.¹⁸ Children who experience bereavement are at an increased risk of lower attainment and behavioural problems.¹⁹
12. The findings of our consultation with UK educators underscore the overwhelming concern of teachers for students' mental health and wellbeing. The terms 'mental health', 'wellbeing', and 'safety' were mentioned repeatedly in written comments, highlighted by these words of a primary school teacher: 'As a teacher, I really hope to be with my class when we go back whenever that might be...children need to know who are there waiting for them — their class, their teacher, their teaching assistants. They need time. They need to feel safe again.' These concerns were expressed during lockdown, but the consequences of social isolation, trauma, and grief will be long-lasting for young people. As schools prepare to return to in-person learning and during the long road to 'normality,' they need to be given the resources and space to prioritise social and emotional needs. Research demonstrates that social and emotional learning has long-term positive impacts on behaviour, academic outcomes, and future success.²⁰
13. An emergency augmentation of curriculums to better prioritise social and emotional skills is essential to ensure young people are able to understand and manage their own emotions, build empathy for one another and those most in need, and to nurture stronger communities at a time of chronic national stress.²¹ Maintaining a sense of community and providing pastoral support are important components of wellbeing, as described in the DfE Guidance on Supporting Wellbeing.²² However, prioritising social and emotional skills extends beyond providing pastoral care and mental health support. To enable learners to actively practice and apply social and emotional skills in daily life involves ensuring that schools have the time and resource to embed social and emotional learning across the curriculum. Research shows that this is most effective when schools are able to implement a holistic, tailored approach, including engaging in conversations with staff, students, and parents to identify needs, investing in continuous staff professional learning, creating a supportive school environment, and promoting social and emotional competencies amongst students inside and outside the classroom.²³

¹⁶ [Disasters, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.](#)

¹⁷ [That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief, Harvard Business Review, March 2020](#)

¹⁸ [Consequences of social isolation for children and adolescents, No Isolation, April 2019](#)

¹⁹ [How can bereavement affect a child?, EduCare, November 2018](#)

²⁰ [Social and Emotional Learning Impact, CASEL, n.d.](#)

²¹ [Social and Emotional Learning: Skills for Life and Work, Early Intervention Foundation, 2015](#)

²² [Guidance on Supporting Wellbeing, Department for Education, May 2020](#)

²³ [An Initial Guide to Leveraging the Power of Social and Emotional Learning As You Plan to Open and Renew Your School, CASEL, May 2020](#)

14. Covid-19 has laid bare the deficiencies of our education system - the pressure to meet stringent academic targets has cut into educators' time and capacity to build the emotional, social, and civic skills young people need to navigate the short- and long-term consequences of the crisis. Schools are as much communities as they are sites of learning; wellbeing and community cohesion are not just nice-to-haves but integral to wellbeing, individual and collective resilience, and civic responsibility.²⁴ As schools prepare to return to phased in-person learning, it is essential that teachers and students are provided with the time and resource to navigate the short- and long-term challenges of the pandemic. Social and emotional skills enable young people to transform anxiety into agency - even in normal times, these skills are the building blocks for the engaged, constructive citizenship vital to building sustainable, inclusive societies.

Confronting increased risks of online and offline hate, in and around schools

15. Pre-Covid, Protection Approaches had been increasingly concerned about UK-wide risk factors for identity-based violence, identifying widespread disinformation, propaganda, and fake news as a key component of society-wide conditions that increase the risk of IBV. Offline impacts of online harms are well-documented, as the APPG on Hate Crime found in a 2019 report: *"The internet is a key breeding ground for hate crimes and acts of hate speech, and there has not been a quick enough realisation of the links between online attacks and 'real-world' incidents."*²⁵ Therefore, it is essential to address online and offline harms through a joined-up response, with civic education at the heart of preventing hate and building a more inclusive society.

16. The Covid-19 pandemic has been accompanied by a *disinfodemic* with waves of dis- and misinformation, both organically and malevolently generated, instrumentalised for political, racist, xenophobic, and other reasons.²⁶ These trends risk undermining our already fragile social cohesion. Young people are especially vulnerable to harmful online content, particularly during times of high stress - and increased screen time. Covid-19 has also been accompanied by a 'tsunami of hate.'²⁷ During lockdown, there was a precipitous rise of anti-Asian hate crimes which increased by 21% in the UK.²⁸ In response, we have scaled our hate crime prevention work by offering free online workshops and webinars for British Chinese and South East Asian community groups from across the country, linking them to Metropolitan Police representatives, local government officials, and faith leaders. Through our work with community groups, we know that hate crime figures are underreported due to cultural, linguistic, and other barriers. We, the police, and our local partners anticipate increased risks of hate incidents as lockdown restrictions ease. Reports of antisocial behaviour increasing have been noted by police in Hampshire and Wilshire.²⁹

17. Therefore, the need to prioritise online media literacy in schools is now urgent; this should include resources that help young people to recognise harmful content and think critically about information consumption. When we asked 111 primary and secondary school teachers what resources they most need during and after the pandemic, 74% of teachers said they would like resources that help students recognise fake news and think critically about information consumption. Such solutions to online harms will only be effective together with

²⁴ [Building resilience through education: Covid-19 and beyond, Protection Approaches, May 2020](#)

²⁵ [How Do We Build Community Cohesion When Hate Crime Is On The Rise?, APPG Hate Crime, 2019](#)

²⁶ [Combating the Disinfodemic: Working for truth in the time of COVID-19, UNESCO, 2020](#)

²⁷ [Global report: virus has unleashed a 'tsunami of hate' across world, says UN chief, The Guardian, May 2020](#)

²⁸ [Anti-Asian hate crimes up 21% in UK during coronavirus crisis, The Guardian, May 2020](#)

²⁹ [Police receive double number of anti-social behaviour reports during coronavirus lockdown, Swindon Advertiser, May 2020; Hampshire police prepared for increase in antisocial behaviour at 'whatever pace it comes', The News, May 2020](#)

offline responses that build interpersonal relationships and strengthen communities such as supporting teachers to facilitate positive debate and foster civic responsibility. A further 77% teachers were interested in resources on how young people can play a role in building kind and resilient communities during and after the pandemic.

18. We have documented how education approaches based on community building and conflict resolution reduce identity-based tensions, produce positive attitude and behaviour change, and reduce violence. Schools need to be provided with the resources and space to work in partnership with experts in violence prevention and cohesion building to ensure that young people are empowered with the knowledge and tools to combat hate in their school environments and wider communities.

Developing whole-school approaches to building individual and societal resilience

19. Schools are themselves communities that can help young people play an active role in building kinder, more resilient societies during and after the crisis. This is not the job of teachers alone; rather whole-school, joined-up approaches are the most efficient and cost-effective means of nurturing respect for differences and resilience across the school culture, curriculum, and extracurricular activities. Whole-of-school approaches should involve senior leadership as well as the student body and can be strengthened by external support from experts in trauma, social cohesion, media literacy, and positive debate. Our educator survey found that training on whole-school approaches to building tolerance and resilience was by far the most popular choice of training, desired by 73% of respondents.
20. School years as a formative, socialising experience are the most efficient and cost-effective means to nurture the next generation's resilience through a joined-up, whole-school approach. Research demonstrates that whole-school approaches that prioritise social and emotional learning positively impact individuals (e.g. improving mental health and attainment) and wider societies (e.g. enhancing prosocial behaviour and community resilience).³⁰ Global best practice demonstrates that education, in times of stability and crisis, is society's most effective tool for building societal resilience and tackling the processes that lead to all forms of identity-based violence.³¹
21. Whole-school approaches are also an effective means to identify and address root causes of inequality and structural violence. The Covid-19 pandemic has not impacted all population groups equally. Our educator survey respondents raised particular concern for vulnerable children or those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The disproportionate rate at which Britain's BAME communities have been affected by the pandemic has been covered widely by racial equality groups and the press.³² Young people with special educational needs are particularly prone to suffer from the consequences of social isolation and lack of routine.³³ Therefore it is vital that whole-school approaches to resilience have the principles of intersectional, inclusive participation at their heart. The views and experiences of marginalised, socially dislocated communities with protected characteristics must be integrated into guidance on designing and implementing such approaches.
22. Understanding schools as communities prepares young people to live and participate in their local area and wider society, providing them with the emotional, social, and civic skills they

³⁰ [Social and Emotional Learning Impact, CASEL, nd.](#)

³¹ Peace education: A pathway to a culture of peace, Nario-Galace, Jasmin & Navarro-Castro, Loreta, Center for Peace Education, 2011

³² [British BAME Covid-19 death rate 'more than twice that of whites', The Guardian, May 2020](#)

³³ [COVID-19 Mental Health Effects on Children and Adolescents, Psychology Today, May 2020](#)

need to navigate the short-and long-term consequences of the greatest crisis the country has faced since the Second World War. Global best practice shows that education is the most effective tool for building empathy, respect for differences, civic responsibility, and resilience against all kinds of crises. In the aftermath of the Second World War, UNESCO was founded to promote education as a tool for disrupting prejudice and building peace in all societies. We now have a rare opportunity to take action and rebuild our education system to reflect the values that we are celebrating during the pandemic — empathy, resilience, and civic responsibility.

Recommendations to the Department for Education

23. Actively reach out and consult population groups disproportionately affected by the crisis to ensure their needs are prioritised and integrated into guidance for schools
24. Make emergency augmentation to school curriculums to make space for school senior leadership teams and teachers to prioritise Social and Emotional Learning as well as media literacy and civic skills
25. Establish easy-access, quick release funds to support experts in trauma, social cohesion, media literacy, and positive debate to work with schools and school policymakers
26. Prepare guidance and toolkits for when schools return to in-person learning on implementing whole school approaches to wellbeing and civic engagement

Recommendations to OFSTED

27. Recognise that the priorities of schools will rightly have changed. Adjust the inspection framework to put more weight on Personal Development particularly focussed on resilience, wellbeing, and mental health
28. Consult with schools to consider postponing inspections until at least September 2021 in order to enable schools to have the time to prioritise Personal Development