



# **Schools' Response to Knife Crime in Schools**

**Briefing Note**

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Scope: 40 schools across England (primary, secondary, special, PRUs)

As part of the Department for Education's (DfE) serious violence research programme, DfE commissioned Verian to conduct qualitative research with schools and school leaders to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which schools identify and respond to serious violence and knife crime within schools.

## Knife Crime as Part of a Wider Safeguarding Ecosystem

- Schools don't treat knife crime as a standalone issue.
- It's embedded within broader safeguarding concerns: gang culture, mental health, deprivation, online harms.
- Most incidents are perceived to occur outside school, but concern about onsite incidents is rising.

**Figure 1: Ecosystem of interlinked safeguarding concerns**



## Prevention Activities

- Schools use a mix of whole-school and targeted interventions.
- Activities include assemblies, PSHE lessons, mentoring, and external workshops.

## Intervention decisions are based on:

- School-level risk (location, community-police relations)
- Pupil-level risk (SEND, SEMH, substance use, exposure to crime)

- Funding and staffing constraints.

## Responding to Incidents

Schools follow a four-stage response:

1. Detection and initial response
2. Information gathering
3. External involvement (police, parents, social care)
4. Decision-making and sanctions

## Two approaches to sanctions:

- Zero-tolerance: immediate exclusion
- Case-by-case: contextual response based on pupil needs

*“School staff highlighted that they were doing an increasing amount of work that would have traditionally sat in the social work and police space. This included working with parents and handling issues outside of school. They attributed this to other agencies not having the capacity to pick it up. They were concerned that this trend was not showing any sign of stopping and predicated that schools would continue to gain more safeguarding responsibilities. Some were concerned that schools were being left to deal with the issues, such as declining pupil mental health and increased criminal exploitation of pupils, which have a wider cause that neither schools nor the DfE can fix.”*

## Policy Implementation

Knife crime policies are usually part of wider safeguarding or behaviour policies.

- Staff training is the most common implementation method.
- Schools engage pupils, parents, and carers — but want more guidance on how to this more meaningfully.

## Support Needs Identified

Schools are requesting:

- Clearer DfE guidance on knife crime-specific policy (e.g. search, restraint, offsite incidents)
- More training and resources for staff
- Better partnership frameworks with police and external agencies
- Support for engaging parents/carers effectively

## Summary and implications for Schools

- Schools are increasingly expected to act as first responders to serious violence.
- There's a need for joined-up safeguarding systems, especially where external services are stretched.
- Knife crime prevention must be contextual, proportionate, and embedded in whole-school culture.

Link to online document:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68d12f0ee65dc716bfb1dbda/Schools\\_response\\_to\\_knife\\_crimes\\_in\\_schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68d12f0ee65dc716bfb1dbda/Schools_response_to_knife_crimes_in_schools.pdf)

At HH:SM schools have a weapon's policy that includes knife crime and making necessary and proportionate decisions around mitigating risk. This aligns with the above expectations. Further information and resources to support schools will continue to be shared.