



# Understanding the Implementation of the Prevent Duty in County Durham Schools

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## **1. Introduction**

The Prevent Duty has been a cornerstone policy of the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) since its inception 2 decades ago. Since then, it has undergone multiple iterations and overhauls with its scope radically changing. This included an important expansion by imposing legal obligations upon frontline practitioners and their agencies,<sup>1</sup> requiring them to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".<sup>2</sup> Crucially, the immediate post enforcement of this duty saw schools being the highest contributor of referrals related to 'Islamist extremism'.<sup>3</sup> However, this came with its fair share of controversies and problems subsequently further expanded in this report.

Given its significance and prevalence in schools, this report seeks to ascertain how well the Prevent Duty has been implemented in schools, especially after the numerous changes and most recent guidance update. The research and analysis will centre around County Durham schools with its wider societal context and background being taken into account. The report will be structured to first explore the history and context of how today's Prevent Duty guidance has been formed; followed by its relevance to schools and their generally accepted expectations. Eventually, the research findings will be explored through notable themes and trends, before concluding with an analysis, offering possible rationales to understand such implementation and areas for improvement.

## **2. Background on Prevent Duty**

### **2.1 What is Prevent Duty?**

As mentioned, the Prevent Duty is part of the broader CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy first introduced in 2003. While it was initially conceptualised as an international-focused programme in the wake of the 9/11 attacks due to fears of a similarly imminent attack in the UK.<sup>4</sup> The current model and 4 pillars of CONTEST (Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare) were adopted instead, as fears of 'homegrown' extremism and terrorism were realised after the 7/7 London Bombings in 2005,<sup>5</sup> with Prevent emerging as a domestic programme. At the time, it was at the forefront of global counter terrorism policies, being one of the first to develop a framework for "stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism".<sup>6</sup> However because it was also a

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Thomas, 'Britain's Prevent Strategy: Always Changing, Always the Same?' [2020] *The Prevent Duty in Education* 11

<sup>2</sup> HM Government, 'Prevent Duty Guidance' (gov.uk website, 2015)

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>> accessed 7 September 2024

<sup>3</sup> Busher, J., and L. Jerome. 2020. *The Prevent Duty in Education: Impact, Enactment and Implications*. UK: Palgrave.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* (n 1) 13

<sup>5</sup> Shereen Fernandez, 'When counter-extremism 'sticks': the circulation of the Prevent Duty in the school space' [2024] *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 665

<sup>6</sup> Joel Busher, Tufyal Choudhury and Paul Thomas, 'The enactment of the counter-terrorism "Prevent duty" in British schools and colleges: beyond reluctant accommodation or straightforward policy acceptance' [2019] *12 Critical Studies on Terrorism* 440

policy explicitly focusing only on Muslim communities,<sup>7</sup> it was relentlessly contested from its inception as being unfair and stigmatising Muslims, with broader policy approaches advocated for by local government and civil society organisations.<sup>8</sup>

This monocultural approach was eventually replaced with the introduction of the 2011 Prevent Review.<sup>9</sup> It rolled back most Muslim-centric narratives, opting for an expanded and broader understanding of ‘extremism’ that encompasses all types of terrorism. Furthermore, it implemented and defined a set of ‘Fundamental British Values’ into formal education, in a bid to improve community cohesion after the previously divisive policies.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly, it also changed the direction of Prevent’s approach to one primarily focused on “identifying and diverting individuals vulnerable to radicalisation” to Channel, an anti-radicalisation and rehabilitation programme.<sup>11</sup> This was done by its attempts to quantify and create a system of reliably identifying vulnerability and then disrupting it through the concept of ‘radicalisation’;<sup>12</sup> a term developed in the midst of domestic terrorism fears post 9/11 to characterise people who are likely to be sympathetic or undertake terrorist acts.<sup>13</sup>

In 2015, the policy saw another internationally unprecedented addition as it was placed on statutory footing in public sectors like schools and social services. This meant that the identified “specified authorities” are now legally bound to adhere to the Prevent Duty, a statutory guidance that sets out what must be done to comply with the law regarding counter-terrorism preventive measures. While not technically a law, this guidance still must be largely followed unless there is a good reason not to according to the precedent set in *R v Islington LBC*.<sup>14</sup>

The most updated Prevent Duty guidance has continued to readjust definitions of certain keywords like ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’. The latter is still under review now even though the new revamped definition was published on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024. This is largely due to the ever-volatile international situation, with this change directly motivated by the October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas incursion into Israel.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tufyal Choudhury, “Integration, Security and Faith Identity in Social Policy in Britain.” [2010] *Managing Ethnic Diversity after 9/11: Integration, Security and Civil Liberties in Transatlantic Perspective* 79

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* (n 1) 14

<sup>9</sup> HM Government, ‘*Prevent Strategy*’ (gov.uk website, 2011)

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-strategy-2011>> accessed 14 September 2024

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* (n 1) 17

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* (n 1) 18

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* (n 6) 442

<sup>13</sup> Rik, Coolsaet. ‘All radicalisation is local’: The genesis and drawbacks of an elusive concept’ [2016] Egmont Paper 84

<sup>14</sup> [1998] 1 CCLR 119

<sup>15</sup> HM Government, ‘New definition of extremism’ (gov.uk website, 2024)

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-definition-of-extremism-2024/new-definition-of-extremism-2024>> accessed 14 September 2024

## 2.2 What is its relevance in schools

The former Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, justified the inclusion of Prevent Duty as a statutory status in 2015 when she argued that “The battle against it [terrorism] begins at school, where young people learn to be active, resilient and tolerant citizens who are ready to seize the rich opportunities of modern Britain.”<sup>16</sup> This is especially so given the highly “impressionable nature of the student population,” making higher educational communities much more vulnerable in succumbing to extremism.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the 2015 statutory revision and drastic changes were also likely spurred on due to major national incidents that shook the educational landscape. For example, the ‘Trojan Horse affair’ involving threats sent to Park View Academy in 2013, claiming that their educators have been radicalised. While false, it still succeeded in creating unrest with the possibility of such an incident legitimately happening. This feeling was further exacerbated by the Bethnal Green Academy incident in 2014, whereby 3 schoolgirls travelled abroad to join ISIS to be ‘jihadi brides’.<sup>18</sup> These incidents further ignited debates and re-affirmed the fact that “schools needed to do more to tackle extremism and radicalisation”, due to the possibility that they can be used for “extremist desires”.<sup>19</sup>

Such instances exemplify the constant evolution of these extremist groups and their bid to garner greater outreach, both internationally and domestically; similarly forcing counter-terrorism policies and mindsets to adapt accordingly, shifting towards more “holistic and preventive stances than hitherto”.<sup>20</sup> While still arguably the most powerful and tangible counter, it clearly can no longer be solely confined to pure, ‘hard’ police and militaristic might. Alternatively, more emphasis has been placed on ‘soft’ engagements with bedrock local entities like healthcare and schools

## 2.3 What are schools expected to do

According to the Prevent duty guidance for specified authorities, the ‘compliance with prevent duty’ section details what is expected. However, the document also points out the explicit difference between the use of ‘should’ and ‘must’ and their intentional uses. ‘Must’ is used when it is legally required, while ‘should’ establishes that it is good guidance to follow.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> HC Deb 29 January 2015, vol 591, col 1018

<sup>17</sup> Ed Hussein, *The Islamist* (Penguin, 2007), Chapters 6–7

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* (n 5)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* (n 5)

<sup>20</sup> Clive Walker and Javaid Rehman, ‘Prevent’ responses to jihadi extremism’ [2012] *Global Anti-Terrorism Law and Policy* 242

<sup>21</sup> HM Government, ‘Prevent duty guidance: Guidance for specified authorities in England and Wales’ (gov.uk website, 2023)

<[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e5a5bd3f69457ff1035fe2/14.258\\_HO\\_Prevent+Duty+Guidance\\_v5d\\_Final\\_Web\\_1\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e5a5bd3f69457ff1035fe2/14.258_HO_Prevent+Duty+Guidance_v5d_Final_Web_1_.pdf)> accessed 19 September 2024

Recommended level of compliance for school:

1. Partnership
  - a. Schools should work with local Prevent leads, the police and the local authorities, facilitated through multi-agency forums
  - b. Prevent referral and co-operation with multi-agency involvement
2. Capabilities should be developed and maintained by specified authorities
  - a. Training and induction
    - i. Staff
      1. should understand the terms “radicalisation”, “terrorism” and “extremism”
      2. know the measures and indicators to prevent radicalisation
    - ii. Prevent-specific responsibilities like DSLs are likely to require additional, more regular training.
  - b. Managing risk – Risk assessment
    - i. Should conduct a risk assessment to help understand national, regional and local risks, allowing for more targeted implementation
3. Reducing permissive environments
  - a. Required to promote fundamental British values to build resilience through the curriculum

### **3. Methodology**

While the overarching project focuses on all schools within the Durham County Council area, this research report will primarily utilise data collected from all Secondary schools for students aged between 11 to 19. Additionally, data and analysis from Special schools will be included and compared where appropriate.

In total there are 27 Secondary schools and 7 Special schools within the specified area. Their publicly accessible Prevent policies via the school website were then used to collect data points regarding:

1. Definitions of keywords (Extremism, Radicalisation and Terrorism)
2. Indicators of radicalization
3. Prevent/Channel Referral
4. Training
5. Fundamental British Values

These were chosen in relation to the aforementioned obligations schools have when complying with Prevent duty, aimed to provide a more tangible aspect in understanding its implementation within schools.

This data was inputted into an Excel spreadsheet, before being further collated into a Word document. Further including comparisons between old and updated policies (school and government) when available. Using thematic analysis, key trends and unique points were then identified for analysis.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Overall implementation in secondary schools

All schools researched have largely published some form of policy or mentioned their Prevent Duty obligations, albeit to varying degrees of detail with many not fully covering the identified key compliance points.

### 4.2 Definitions

With a total of 34 schools researched, only 27 of them included explicit definitions for the 3 keywords detailed by the guidance documents. However, within this 79% implementation rate, 81% or 22 schools are still referring to the old Keep Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2023 definitions. Only 5 schools implemented the new definitions; 4 of them updated only their 'radicalisation' definitions keeping in line with KCSIE 2024, with the last school only updating their 'extremism' definition following the new updated government version published in March 2024.

### 4.3 Indicators

There was a slightly higher implementation rate of 82%, whereby only 6 schools completely failed to mention and include any form of indicators. Further breaking it down, of the 28 schools this could be classified into 4 different groups with identical indicator segments:

- 4 schools referenced government websites like Educate Against Hate and NSPCC
- 7 schools included the same 5 indicators
- 14 schools used a general statement referencing changing pupil's behaviour
- 3 schools mentioned it separate documents with 2 introducing unique indicators that also considered 'families at risk'

### 4.4 Channel Referral

Most schools referenced the Channel referral system with a standard paragraph detailing what it is, how referrals will be passed down the multi-agency panel and providing links to external Channel guidance.

Out of the 29 schools (85%) that provided information on Channel, 6 of them further included the Prevent referral flow chart (County Durham). This provided a more understandable overview of the referral process and where the different agencies involved come into play. Interestingly, 4 of the 6 schools that linked this flowchart were classed by Durham County Council as 'Special'<sup>22</sup> schools.

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<sup>22</sup> Durham County Council, 'A to Z of schools' (durham.gov.uk website, 2024)  
<<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/4526/A-to-Z-of-schools>> accessed 30 September 2024

## 4.5 Training

All schools mentioned training of staff to be Prevent ready in their safeguarding documents. The most common training schedule was for individuals to be trained when first joining the school, followed by frequent re-training every 1 to 2 years. It usually also notes that the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and its deputy would have additional training in the referral process and as the first point of contact for possible pupil radicalisation cases.

## 4.6 Fundamental British Values

There was an 88% implementation rate with 30 schools mentioning the adherence or incorporation of the fundamental British values in “building pupils”<sup>23</sup> resilience to radicalisation. Despite this, it was largely lacklustre efforts as most schools only briefly referred to it in 1 or 2 sentences. Furthermore, these references were vague and acted more as an acknowledgement of their existence rather than detailing how they were being implemented.

## **5. Analysis and possible rationales**

While there are relatively high implementation rates with an average of 87% across the board, these data points were collected with a generous breadth given what constitutes as having the obligations met. This section will explore identified issues from the data collected, before then attempting to provide possible rationales to understand these issues.

### 5.1 Trusts and identical policies

A key issue that was observed is the prominence of identical safeguarding documents and/or prevent sections. Of the 34 schools, 22 of them (65%) have identical policies. This can then be broken down into 5 separate groups, namely:

1. Advance Learning Partnership Multi Academy Trust (6 Schools)
2. North East Learning Trust (4 Schools)
3. Clennell Education Solutions (4 schools)
4. New College Durham Academies Trust (2 schools)
5. Others (6 schools)

As evident, most of these identical policies originate from schools being part of the same Trust or engaging the same external policy service provider.

This could be possibly explained by the fact that in 2014, a taskforce report indicated poor implementation of fundamental British values and anti-radicalisation policies,

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<sup>23</sup> Department for Education, ‘The Prevent Duty: Departmental Advice for Schools and Childcare Provider’ (gov.uk website, 2015) < [https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Children-and-families-services/Early-Years/The\\_Prevent\\_duty\\_advice\\_for\\_schools\\_and\\_childcare\\_providers\\_June\\_2015.pdf](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Children-and-families-services/Early-Years/The_Prevent_duty_advice_for_schools_and_childcare_providers_June_2015.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2024

along with the failure of local authorities to “take the problem seriously”.<sup>24</sup> Hence because of this, Ofsted inspections were tasked to focus on such areas, with some schools being ultimately downgraded for poor compliance. The most severe infractions saw 5 schools in Birmingham being downgraded to the lowest rating.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, per the taskforce’s recommendations, the Prevent Duty (2015) was published as a legal obligation for specified crucial authorities.

With these two major factors in conjunction, it arguably led to schools being more concerned about producing policies and documents that can pass and maybe even excel during Ofsted inspections. This possibly resulted in the adoption of successful policies used by other schools, or the dissemination of a central document within each Trust. Alternatively, external policy service providers can also be engaged to provide support or completely produce such policies. This can be seen when some County Durham schools are already using such companies like Clennell Education Solutions.

Through further research, the ease of accessing such services was evident and the extent of their help only further compounded the problem. For example the private company, ‘High Speed Training’ produces practical information and resources for four main areas: Food hygiene, Business, Health & Safety and Safeguarding. They have produced a free safeguarding policy template, allegedly written in collaboration with a “qualified DSL and wrote in such a way that it can be used in almost school”, including opportunities “to amend certain sections to reflect your school’s specific procedures”.<sup>26</sup> The safeguarding template included a standard ‘Prevent duty’ section, whereby it explicitly provides a section for schools to “[Enter the name of your school here]”. While possibly adequate for inspections, it is still arguably the bare minimum and extremely generalised.

With such materials readily available and the high tendency to publish identical documents, this poses a problem in the general safeguarding procedure. This has already been identified and flagged as an issue in the recent Independent Review of Prevent. It set forth 34 recommendations which were all accepted by the government. One of which was the recommendation to “build in-house expertise”, suggesting “less reliance on consultancy and public relations firms... to fulfil some of the most sensitive functions that are outsourced to private companies”.<sup>27</sup> It further proposes a few

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<sup>24</sup> HM Government, ‘Tackling extremism in the UK: Report from the prime Minister’s task force on tackling radicalisation and extremism’ (gov.uk website, 2013) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-extremism-in-the-uk-report-by-the-extremism-taskforce#:~:text=Details,the%202011%20'Prevent'%20Strategy.>> accessed 1 October 2024

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Sparrow and Richard Adams “‘Trojan horse’ Row: Downing Street Launches Snap Ofsted Visits.” (guardian website, 2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jun/09/downing-street-launches-snap-ofsted-visits-after-extremism-claims>> accessed 2 October 2024

<sup>26</sup> Liz Burton-Hughes, ‘Creating a Safeguarding Policy – Example Template for Schools’ (High speed training website, 2020) <<https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/safeguarding-policy-template-for-schools/>> accessed 2 October 2024

<sup>27</sup> Home Office, ‘Independent Review of Prevent: One year on progress report - Recommendation 26’ (gov.uk website, 2024) < <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-prevents-report-and-government-response/independent-review-of-prevent-one-year-on-progress-report-accessible#executive-summary>> accessed 2 October 2024

recommendations focusing on improving Prevent training. This creates a problem with identical, pre-made policies as it is unable to reflect and keep up with the constantly updated individualised trainings, constantly detracting and differing from each other, resulting in separate and confusing procedures. Furthermore, many of these policies are only updated yearly, reliance on external providers would result in delays and poor implementation for more time-sensitive updates.

On a more nuanced level, engaging such policy actors might also result in Prevent being unintentionally “recontextualised from security policy to education policy”.<sup>28</sup> This means that the private consultants would re-interpret and translate Prevent, subconsciously reflecting their specialist backgrounds and personal beliefs. For example, Lundie<sup>29</sup> found that consultants with a teaching background were more focused on how this might be a “pre-criminal surveillance space” in schools. Alternatively, consultants with policing backgrounds seemed to focus on how to combine the “principle of policing by consent with the requirements of compulsory schooling”. These vastly different backgrounds will then influence the way the policy they write is framed and implemented, often offering their own independently added perspectives. This might result in policies that fail to reflect the particular school’s values and ethos, or worse still, fail to exemplify the government’s intended aims and outcomes.

## 5.2 Risk assessment (type of threat)

Building upon the issue of identical documents, this also meant that schools would have passed upon the chance to perform an individual risk assessment. Only 3 out of 34 schools mentioned having a risk assessment. Of these 3 schools, only 1 undertook and published a proper risk assessment with the other 2 schools only ending up mentioning it in passing.

King James I Academy was the only school to produce a genuine risk assessment identifying certain key risks. For example, the risk of ‘young people being drawn towards an extreme right wing or other extreme ideology’ was then followed by evaluating prominent hazards like ‘online communication’. The evaluation covered both the impact and likelihood figures which then produced a final risk rating.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that risk assessments are only classed as recommended would contribute greatly to its lack of use. Furthermore, while not entirely accurate to attribute the low rate of implementation solely on identical documents, it still played a major role as those schools completely relied on the main Trust team or service providers. Any

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<sup>28</sup> Lee Jerome, Alex Elwick and Raza Kazim ‘The Impact of the Prevent Duty on Schools: A Review of the Evidence’ [2019] 45 British Educational Research Journal 821

<sup>29</sup> David Lundie, ‘Security, Safeguarding and the Curriculum: Recommendations for effective multi-agency Prevent work in schools’ (CEPA, 2017) <<http://cepa.hope.ac.uk/safetysecuritycurriculum/>> accessed 2 October 2024

<sup>30</sup> Mhairi Barnfield, ‘Prevent Duty Risk Assessment’ (King James I Academy, 2024) <<https://kingjames1academy.com/uploadedimages/academylife/about/policies/Prevent%20Duty%20Risk%20Assessment.pdf>> accessed 2 October 2024

defence of ignorance and inexperience would be hard to believe as the government has provided a sample “Prevent risk assessment for schools”,<sup>31</sup> providing detailed sections and guidance for producing one.

This lack of risk assessments might prove extremely detrimental to the overall implementation of the Prevent duty. The Prevent duty and its accompanying guidance documents were drafted and published as a broad, overarching policy. However, potential cases of extremism and radicalisation cannot be defined by one standard. As the recent Independent Review of Prevent concurs, “there is no single pathway to radicalisation. There are many factors which can, either alone or combined, lead someone to subscribe to extremist ideology, that in some cases, radicalises them into terrorism.”<sup>32</sup>

To reiterate, the focal point of Prevent is to stop people from becoming or supporting terrorism through early intervention. This is only effective and possible when different areas of risks have been thoroughly identified and accessed. Hence, the lack of such risk assessments becomes a problem as schools remain unaware of evolving trends and growing areas for concern. For example, while the government overtly “recognises that Islamist terrorism is the greatest threat”,<sup>33</sup> the Home Office has identified a growing threat of far-right wing extremism.<sup>34</sup> This trend is further supported when the head of MI5 reported through his annual threat update in November 2022, that the Extreme Right Wing Terrorism threat increased from 1 in 5 cases in 2021<sup>35</sup> to a quarter of their caseload in 2022.<sup>36</sup>

The likelihood of such threats further increases in certain areas due to feelings of abandonment and resentment fuelled by larger income inequalities. As evidenced by inequality being a key feature in the “dramatic successes of radical-right parties around the world and cases such as Trump and Brexit”.<sup>37</sup> Brexit specifically can be attributed to discontent with “Britain’s glaring, regionally patterned economic inequality”.<sup>38</sup> With the north-east of England being reported as having the lowest levels of overall and average

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<sup>31</sup> Department for Education, ‘Prevent duty: risk assessment template’ (gov.uk website, 2023) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-risk-assessment-templates>> accessed 2 October 2024

<sup>32</sup> Ibid (n 27)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid (n 27)

<sup>34</sup> Home Office, ‘Fact Sheet: Right-Wing Terrorism’ (Home Office Media, 20 September 2019) <<https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/09/20/fact-sheet-right-wing-terrorism/>> accessed 2 October 2024

<sup>35</sup> MI5, ‘Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update 2021’ (MI5 website, 2021) <<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update-2021>> accessed 2 October 2024

<sup>36</sup> MI5, ‘Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update’ (MI5 website, 2022) <<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update>> accessed 2 October 2024

<sup>37</sup> Martin Lukk, ‘Politics of Boundary Consolidation: Income Inequality, Ethnonationalism, and Radical-Right Voting’ [2024] 10 *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*

<sup>38</sup> Fetzer Thiemo, ‘Did Austerity Cause Brexit?’ [2019] 109 *American Economic Review* 3849

wealth, almost half of their southern counterparts,<sup>39</sup> it is a genuine cause for concern. Yet only 3 schools acknowledged the changing threats and possibility of far-right radicalisation, showcasing the clear inadequacy of Prevent implementation.

### 5.3 'Updated' documents

Another area with a similar problem is the supposedly updated documents. As many of the policies were due to be reviewed in September, this report has managed to document and compare 2023-24 and 2024-25 documents for schools who updated at the time of the second data review. This resulted in 15 schools with updated documents, whereby 13 were from 4 different trusts with 1 independent school. Hence there were ultimately only 5 updated documents to compare.

For most of these documents, the reviews and changes were negligible, largely being a near direct copy of the old policy. While there might be acknowledgements that it is following new government guidance and policies, the content itself fails to be updated and continues to reflect old policies. The infringement is especially apparent with bold changes to include 'revised Prevent duty guidance'<sup>40</sup> or explicit mention of the most updated 'Prevent duty guidance (2023)',<sup>41</sup> while still consistently quoting paragraphs 57-76 of the Prevent guidance (2015) which are "specially related to schools". The section for schools within the new guidance is now found in paragraphs 141 – 210, with the currently quoted paragraphs 57 – 76 covering 'compliance with Prevent duty' and ending abruptly mid-section. The only slight notable difference can be found in the 4 schools of the North East Learning Trust, whereby they updated their definition of 'radicalisation'.

This is especially worrying and poor implementation as new definitions for both 'extremism' and 'radicalisation' have been published. The update for 'extremism' was directly motivated by the terror attacks in the Hamas-Israel conflict,<sup>42</sup> arguably increasing its importance and urgency. If such simple adjustments were failed to be made, the current safeguarding policies while stated as updated, might be severely outdated instead. Any concerned but less trained staff members might then engage with such ineffective materials, resulting in different applications of the same duty within a singular school community.

Referring to the same independent report, recommendation 30 highlights the need to "rapidly rebut" misinformation and challenge inaccuracies about Prevent.<sup>43</sup> In an age of misinformation whereby fear mongering is easily manipulatable via ignorance, this

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<sup>39</sup> Marcus Johns, et al., 'State of the North 2024: Charting the course for a decade of renewal' (Institute for Public Policy Research website, 2024) <<https://www.ippr.org/articles/state-of-the-north-2024>> accessed 3 October 2024

<sup>40</sup> Bishop Barrington, 'Safeguarding – KCSIE' (Advance Learning Partnership Multi Academy Trust, 2024) <<https://www.every.education//Open/DocumentTracker?guid=97323bb0-f7b1-4ac6-9733-d57643d4f36a&vkey=149737&ppk=15006>> accessed 3 October 2024

<sup>41</sup> Easington Academy, 'Safeguarding policy' (North East Learning Trust, 2024) <[https://www.easingtonacademy.co.uk/\\_filecache/ebf/476/43743-nelt-safeguarding-policy.pdf](https://www.easingtonacademy.co.uk/_filecache/ebf/476/43743-nelt-safeguarding-policy.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2024

<sup>42</sup> Ibid (n 15)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid (n 27)

issue becomes especially significant to resolve. However, these documents will be published at a national level. With such poor updates, it is possible that these demystifying efforts to “defend the practitioners who help protect communities” will be quickly lost and unimplemented. It will be a huge detriment to any meaningful attempts at tackling an ever-changing issue such as preventing radicalisation.

#### 5.4 SEND Pupils & Special Schools

Through this research, it is evident that SEND pupils have been largely overlooked in terms of safeguarding, and more specifically in Prevent efforts. All the schools researched have SEND sections and are obliged to publish a SEN information report on how the school’s efforts to support and expand accessibility for such students. While they usually include tailor-made curriculums and adjusted application procedures, safeguarding or Prevent adjustments were usually always missing.

The guidance explicitly mentions in section 37 that: “A person’s susceptibility to radicalisation may be linked to their vulnerability. A person can be vulnerable if they need special care, support or protection because of age, disability, risk of abuse or neglect. A person’s vulnerabilities may be relevant to their susceptibility to radicalisation and to the early intervention approach that is required to divert them away from radicalisation.”<sup>44</sup>

It might be understandable that no standard secondary or sixth-form schools implemented a separate set of procedures and safeguards due to resource constraints. However, 5 out of 7 of the listed ‘Special’ schools specifically catering to SEND children unfortunately have identical policies to one another. While that might be acceptable were the policies altered, these documents followed a standard Prevent section format. Lacking definitions, risk assessments and only briefly addressing possible indicators in a brief sentence rather than listing out more personalised and indicators unique to such students; it was a lacklustre attempt and poor implementation for a group deemed so much more vulnerable to radicalisation.

This problem is further compounded by the 2022 Intelligence and Security Committee Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism inquiry. It clearly supports this need for differentiated measures. It found that in the UK, young people convicted of such offences often had “neuro-developmental conditions like Asperger’s or autism spectrum disorder”.<sup>45</sup> This observation is strengthened again when considering how 30% of Extreme Right-Wing European lone actors suffered from a mental health disorder.<sup>46</sup> While not much data is available about such problems and the extent to which mental health disorders are

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<sup>44</sup> Home Office, ‘Prevent duty guidance’ (gov.uk website, 2023)

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>> accessed 3 October 2024

<sup>45</sup> Julian Lewis, “‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament” (gov.uk website, 2022) <[https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism\\_Accessible.pdf](https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2024

<sup>46</sup> Simon Copeland and Sarah Marsden, ‘The Relationship Between Mental Health Problems and Terrorism’, (CREST, 2020), <<https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-relationship-between-mental-health-problems-and-terrorism/>> accessed 3 October 2024

linked to terrorism, it is clear that a “significant proportion of Prevent is safeguarding vulnerable individuals at risk of exploitation or abuse”.<sup>47</sup>

Admittedly, the guidance has never explicitly mentioned the need for customised anti-radicalisation policies. However, given Prevent’s “overall objective of stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism”,<sup>48</sup> and their increased vulnerability, it seems only fair to attempt to implement greater measures to identify and counter these heightened risks.

## **6. Conclusion**

Through this report, the myriad of problems arising due to poor implementation of the Prevent duty is a cause for concern. It is clear that most of these schools were more concerned with publishing a standard document satisfactory to Ofsted levels<sup>49</sup>, rather than ensuring proper curriculum and threat adjustments. It seems that even with central government guidance allowing for greater individual agency in implementation, it has proven ineffective if schools are not under enough scrutiny and oversight. However, the latest implementation updates of the independent Prevent review recommendations show positive development to counter these issues. There has been a full transition into a regional model of implementation, with experts and advisors able to closely oversee, support and guide their respective local authorities. Lastly, while only explicitly mentioned by Staindrop Academy on their website, it states that their “full Prevent policy” is “available on request from school.”<sup>50</sup> It raises the possibility of a more developed and detailed guide not publicly shared for possible safety concerns, being another factor to consider when evaluating their Prevent implementations.

In conclusion, while the current state of proper Prevent adoption is arguably poor, hopefully the provided rationales and context have helped with understanding its implementation in Durham County.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid (n 27)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid (n 27)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid (n 28)

<sup>50</sup> Staindrop Academy, ‘Prevent’ (Staindrop website, 2024) <<https://staindropacademy.com/about-us/prevent/>> accessed 3 October 2024

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