

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

### **Intro**

The turn of the millennium saw the global dialogue on counter-terrorism strategy increase exponentially<sup>1</sup>. While other countries took a top-heavy approach, the UK government opted for a 'bottom-up' strategy, meaning that preventing terrorism was going to come from local authorities, rather than a more centralised approach. The Prevent duty was introduced by the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. Section 26 places a duty on specific authorities to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.'<sup>2</sup> This research paper will focus specifically on the Prevent duty required of schools. While the Prevent duty has been widely criticised due to concerns over racial profiling, the rise of Islamophobia, and the concern for the emergence of a surveillance state<sup>3</sup>, it has more specifically been criticised by schools. In 2016 National Union of Teachers rejected the imposition of Prevent as a statutory duty, arguing that it encourages stereotyping, leading to counter-productive divisions within schools.<sup>4</sup> Hence, a specific focus on the implementation of the Prevent duty in schools is important to determine whether the suspected disengagement from schools is true, and thus whether Prevent needs to adapt to ensure it can achieve its goal of deradicalisation.

The following questions will be used to guide this report:

1. What are schools expected to do under the Prevent duty?
2. Are schools abiding by this guidance?
3. What does this mean for the implementation of Prevent as an effective counter-terrorism policy?

### **Method**

This project has focused on schools in the Durham County Council area. Thirty schools were randomly selected, all Primary schools aged 2-11. Their Prevent policies are all accessible from their websites, and it is these policy documents that were used in the data collection. The data was then inputted into an Excel spreadsheet with specific headings on:

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<sup>1</sup> Rashmi Singh, Counter-Terrorism in the Post-9/11 Era: Successes, Failures and Lessons Learned. in Richard English (ed), *Illusions of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism* ( 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 cl 26

<sup>3</sup> Suke Wolton, 'The contradiction in the Prevent Duty: Democracy vs 'British values'' [2017] 12(2) Sage Journals

<sup>4</sup> Javier Espinoza, 'Teaching children fundamental British values is act of 'cultural supremacism'' (*The Telegraph*, 28 March 2016) <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/28/teaching-children-fundamental-british-values-is-act-of-cultural/>> accessed 22 August 2024

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1. Extremism
2. Terrorism
3. Radicalisation
4. Channel Referrals
5. British Values
6. Staff Training
7. Comprehensiveness of the document

To analyse the data, I have used thematic analysis in order to identify consistencies and discrepancies with the school's Prevent policies.

### **Section 1: What are schools expected to do under the Prevent duty?**

Schools are under a statutory duty to identify radicalised individuals and report them to the relevant authority, with the aim of deradicalising them. The Prevent duty can be divided into multiple obligations:

1. Staff Training
  1. Staff should have relevant and regular training, it is left to the discretion of the schools how this works
  2. The Designated Safeguard Lead should have more in depth training on how to work with Channel panels
2. Referrals
  1. There should be a clear process for how staff can refer concerns
3. Risk assessment
  1. Each setting should perform a risk assessment which assesses how their learners or staff may be at risk of being radicalised
  2. If there is a specific risk (e.g. online) then steps should be taken to mitigate this
4. British Values
  1. Building resilience through the curriculum by actively promoting British Values

### **Section 2: Are schools abiding by this guidance?**

Overall, most of the schools have taken into account the Prevent duty. Every school researched had some mention of the duty either in its own, separate policy, or as part of

their safeguarding approach. It was more common for schools to have the Prevent duty as part of their overall safeguarding document.

Similarly, staff training was well documented. Training every two years was the most common, and staff are specifically trained on how to spot potential radicalisation.

Under the Prevent duty, schools must demonstrate an awareness and risk of radicalisation in County Durham. Home Office statistics say that the North-East of England has the highest rate of concerns of right-wing radicalisation. Thus, it would be expected that schools in County Durham have assessed this risk of right-wing extremism to their specific establishment. Whilst most schools referred to the overall minimal risk of terrorism in the school and local area, few mentioned the risk of the far right in County Durham. One example of a comprehensive risk assessment was All Saints Lanchester, with p.g. 23 of their Safeguarding Policy including a table on 'contextual safeguarding',<sup>5</sup> which considered the social and economic factor of right wing extremism being evident in some parts of County Durham. Overall, there could be improvement in this area of the Prevent duty. A personalised risk assessment for each school is arguably integral to ensuring the effective implementation of the Prevent duty. Terrorism, as the government have consistently stated, does not look the same everywhere, and in order to effectively tackle radicalisation it is important that a nuanced approach is taken.

Most schools reference the Channel programme and specifically state that the Designated Safeguard Lead knows how to refer and interact with a Channel panel. Interestingly, a common feature of the schools' policies was a link to the Durham Prevent Referral Flowchart (September, 2022),<sup>6</sup> and that schools will follow the flow chart where concerns are identified. This chart has a clear guide on what to do if there is a radicalisation concern. There is a point of first contact, then a Police Prevent Referral Form Assessment, then if it is deemed necessary a referral to Channel will be made, or, if the concerns are too grave and there are serious Prevent concerns then mainstream services with the Police will be used. On the whole, schools were relatively consistent with linking this flowchart in their policies. The ten schools with identical policies all linked this flowchart. Thus, overall, this section of the Prevent duty was consistently met within schools' policies.

Schools must promote British Values as part of the Prevent Duty. The British Values have been developed by the government in order to define and therefore prevent extremism: democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance for

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<sup>5</sup> <https://allsaintslanchester.bwcet.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Safeguarding-and-child-protection-policy-2023-2024-1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://countydurhampartnership.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/PreventReferralRouteFlowchart.pdf>

those of different faiths.<sup>7</sup> Most schools mentioned their commitment to British Values, noting that they were incorporated into the curriculum and that all staff were expected to uphold them. However, where British Values were mentioned, there was a notable lack of detail on how they were to be promoted. For example, inclusion of when lessons are being delivered, in which subject, and how often could improve the implementation of this part of the Prevent duty. However, there were schools that do not mention British Values: Bluebell Meadow Academy, Belmont CofE Primary School, Deaf Hill Primary School. This is significant, as British Values are an integral part of the government's counter-terrorism policy. Furthermore, religious schools such as All Saints Lanchester note that they teach gospel based British Values. This is discussed in the analysis section of my research, as the combination of religion and British Values in the aid to prevent terrorism is potentially counter-productive. Ultimately, there is mixed inclusion of British Values in schools' Prevent policies in County Durham and more could certainly be done to improve.

### **Section 3: What does this mean for the implementation of Prevent as an effective counter-terrorism policy?**

Evidently, there is mixed consistency with the application of the Prevent duty as a whole, and also for its individual requirements. Ultimately, this does matter and does have consequences for the effectiveness of Prevent as a counter-terrorism strategy. This final section of the report explores this further.

#### **Identical Policy Documents**

One key observation was that of the thirty schools, twelve had identical policy documents. Whilst none of the documents clearly state where the policy is from, it seems an external policy provider has created them. Further research suggests that this is a relatively common service, allowing schools to ensure they have met government guidance within their policies.

However, in this case the use of an external policy provider has not ensured schools have met what is required of them under the Prevent duty. Firstly, it means none of these schools have performed an individual risk assessment. This is significant, as these risk assessments are highly important in enabling schools to effectively tackle potential radicalisation. Extremism, radicalisation, and terrorism does not have one look, and therefore it is essential that schools are able to assess the specific risks in each authority. The threat of terrorism is not the same throughout the country; between 2018-2019 the referrals to Prevent in the North-East were over concerns for right-wing extremism, and most of these were children under age 15<sup>8</sup>. The threat of right-wing extremism is much higher in the north of England, as a result of social factors such as

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<sup>7</sup> Theresa May, A Stronger Britain, Built on Our Values, 2015

<sup>8</sup> Home Office Statistics 2018-2019

high unemployment and deprivation levels, allowing far-right groups to exploit socioeconomic grievances to encourage membership.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Home Office has stipulated that the threat of far-right extremism is growing.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is highly important that schools conduct their own risk assessment, and thus the use of a pre-made policy document provided by an external contractor is an example of the Prevent duty not being adequately implemented.

### **Lack of Specific Curriculum Guidance**

As discussed, there was a lack of detail regarding the teaching of British Values in schools. Under the Prevent duty schools are asked to actively promote these values. Whilst most of the policies did list the British Values, to ensure the proper implementation of the Prevent duty more detailed would be useful. Which lessons the British Values will be promoted in and how would be a useful starting point.

In several schools the teaching of British Values is to be done alongside religious education. All Saints Lanchester teach gospel based British values.<sup>11</sup> However, one of the British Values is itself a tolerance for those of different faiths. With extremism often exacerbated and justified by religion, it seems counter-intuitive for a counter-terrorism policy within a school to be taught alongside religion.

### **Definitions**

Whilst the Prevent duty does not require schools to give specific definitions, it would be constructive for schools to do so. This would allow schools to know specifically what they are looking for regarding a child being 'radicalised', exhibiting 'extremist' ideologies. If there is no definition, then what are schools supposed to be looking for, and at what point does concerning behaviour constitute 'radicalised' and what constitutes 'extremism?' The schools that used a policy from an externally contracted supplier, meaning they all had identical policies, did not have any definitions of 'radicalism', 'extremism', or 'terrorism.' Other schools, such as Aycliffe Primary School, Bluebell Meadow Academy, Bournmoor School, also did not have definitions in their policies. Requiring the inclusion of definitions would improve the implementation of the Prevent policy. This would encourage a more uniform approach to counter-terrorism, as it would ensure all local authorities are working with the same definition, and therefore it would be more clear to all members of staff as to what behaviour they should be concerned by.

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<sup>9</sup> Emma Resntrom, 'Exploring a pathway to radicalisation: The effects of social exclusion and rejection sensitivity' [2020] 23(8) Sage Journals

<sup>10</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 22 August 2024

<sup>11</sup> Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy 2023-2024, All Saints' Catholic Primary School, p.g. 23

A good example of a detailed use of definitions was Annfield Primary School.<sup>12</sup> For radicalisation, the policy document had a clear definition and then moved on to several indicators of radicalisation. Annfield does not only rely on central government guidance, rather it goes beyond what is required to specifically detail behaviours that schools should look out for: personal identity crisis, low self-esteem, migration to local community etc. Consequently, the policy (if paired with comprehensive training for staff) is likely to be successful, as staff are clear on what they should be looking for.

However, no school included the new definition of extremism. In 2024, the government introduced a new definition of extremism in response to events in Israel highlighting a need to expand the definition. The new definition is<sup>13</sup>:

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

1. negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or
2. undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or
3. intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2).

In comparison, the old definition was described as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of difference faiths and beliefs' as well as 'calls for the death of members of our armed forces.'<sup>14</sup>

It is not overly concerning that schools had not yet implemented this new definition, as most policies are due for annual review in September. However, it will be something to note in the future.

### **Opposition to Prevent**

Since its inception in 2015, the Prevent duty has generated almost entirely negative press, particularly from the education sector. In 2016 the National Union for teachers rejected the duty<sup>15</sup>, with the key arguments being that it is a counter-productive method for preventing terrorism, leading only to polarisation and isolation of the Muslim community. Consequently, there have been concerns as to how well the Prevent duty has actually be implemented by schools. However, this research overall shows that despite discrepancies regarding the use of pre-made policies, lack of definitions, and

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<sup>12</sup> Annfield Plain Junior School, Safeguarding Policy 2022, p.g. 39

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-definition-of-extremism-2024/new-definition-of-extremism-2024>

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *The Telegraph* n 4

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lack of specific curriculum guidance, there has overall been a positive implementation of the Prevent duty in Durham County Council Schools.

### **Conclusion**

There are a variety of issues with the Prevent duty. On one level, the lack of comprehensive implementation from schools means that there is an overall weakness in the use of Prevent as a counter-terrorism strategy. However, a more centralised approach from the government; one that requires specific definitions, more guidance on the teaching of British Values in the curriculum, and also monitors school policies would enable a more successful implementation of Prevent. Working more closely with schools to reduce opposition to the duty itself in addition to these changes would make for a more effective counter-terrorism policy.

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